

The **#NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch Award** is presented to an executive under 40 whose work (professional and/or volunteer) has been exceptional, innovative, and stands out as a contribution to the industry.

Submission #1

Paul Antonin KOHN

Fondateur, PDG, artiste & producteur exécutif, PsychoKillaRecords

kohnpaulantony13@gmail.com

Paul Antonin KOHN, known artistically as PK@13, is a Cameroonian music entrepreneur, producer, and rapper representing the new generation of African music leaders.

As the Founder & CEO of PsychoKilla Records, an independent label based in Yaoundé, he built a creative ecosystem that bridges local talent with global audiences. Through strategic partnerships with Keyzit Group and streaming platforms such as Boomplay, Spotify, and Apple Music, he has empowered independent artists to reach international visibility.

In 2025, PK@13's single "Nguème" achieved remarkable success — ranking #1 on Boomplay Hip Hop & Rap charts in Japan, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and South Korea, and Top 5 in the USA, Nigeria, and Ghana — a rare milestone for an African independent artist.

Beyond music, PK@13 is a mentor and visionary, motivating young African creators to believe in their craft and build sustainable careers in an evolving global industry.

Under 40 years old, he perfectly embodies the #NEXTGEN_NOW spirit — innovative, self-driven, culturally grounded, and globally connected.

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Paul Antonin KOHN, PsychoKillaRecords
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Submission #2

Alexandria Dávila

CEO, Adarga Entertainment Group

stephanie@adargagroup.com

Special Interview to know more about her: <https://gospelmusic.org/news/celebrate-the-sound-latin-music-interview-with-alexandria-d%C3%A1vila>

I am nominating Alexandria “Alex” Dávila for her exceptional leadership, vision, and impact in the music industry. As partner and CEO of Adarga Entertainment Group, she has positioned the company as a driving force in the growth of Latin Christian music across the United States and Latin America, providing artist development, publishing, marketing, public relations, event production, consulting, and distribution services.

Alex has collaborated with numerous award-winning artists, including Miel San Marcos, TWICE, Alex Campos, for KING & COUNTRY, Bethel Music, and Blanca, as well as leading music companies such as Sony Music, Integrity Music, Curb Records, and Provident Music Group. She has produced major releases, spearheaded iconic concerts at Madison Square Garden and Crypto.com Arena, and contributed to Amazon Music Originals.

Beyond her professional achievements, Alex serves as Latin Committee chair of the Gospel Music Association and has held leadership roles with The Recording Academy. She is also a passionate advocate for the autism community, supporting her son with unwavering dedication. Her combination of strategic vision, industry expertise, and commitment to community makes her an outstanding nominee.

Stephanie Calvinisti, Adarga Entertainment Group
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Submission #3

Amanda Jonat

Associate Director, Music Licensing, SiriusXM

amanda.jonat@siriusxm.com

Amanda Jonat is a constant advocate for label partners and building relationships throughout the industry. I admire her ability to stick to her guns while always wanting to champion the indie artists as much as she possibly can. Even with tough situations she is somebody who stays honest and professional. She treats people the right way and has a true moral compass.

Josiah Albertsen, SiriusXM+Pandora
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Submission #4

Brandon Holman

Head of Industry Relations, Amber Health

brandon@amber.health

My career in the music industry has been shaped by a belief that creative excellence and human well-being are not competing priorities, but deeply interconnected forces. Through my work as a music executive and mental health advocate, I have focused on building sustainable systems of care for artists, executives, and the teams who power this industry. Early in this work, I co-founded Lazuli Collective, a boutique experiential wellness agency where I led partnerships with organizations including Calm, Nike, and Coachella Music Festival. At Coachella, we produced the festival's first-ever onsite wellness activation—bringing accessible mental health and wellness programming directly to fans, artists, and festival staff. This work demonstrated that large-scale music environments can meaningfully integrate care without compromising creativity, culture, or commercial success.

I later served as Vice President of Marketing and Wellness at Guin Records, a first-of-its-kind role in the industry that combined traditional artist marketing leadership with responsibility for artist and employee well-being. In this position, I helped pioneer a more holistic label model—one that recognized mental health as foundational to long-term artist development and business sustainability. This approach was featured in *Billboard*, where I also authored a guest column outlining the need for structural change in how the industry supports its people (<https://www.billboard.com/business/record-labels/marketing-wellness-music-industry-column-brandon-holman-1235366720/>). The visibility of this work helped legitimize wellness as an operational priority rather than a reactive or supplemental offering.

Today, I serve as Head of Industry Relations at Amber Health, the music industry's leading mental health and wellness provider. In this role, I lead partnerships with organizations such as MusiCares and the Country Music Association, and support mental health programming across major tours and artist teams. My work focuses on embedding care directly into the fabric of the industry—from touring and festivals to labels, management companies, and cultural institutions. At a time when burnout, mental health crises, and sustainability are central challenges facing music, my goal is to help shape a future where care is normalized, proactive, and accessible. I am honored to submit myself for this award as someone committed to advancing not only the business of music, but the well-being of the people who make it possible.

Brandon Holman, Amber Health
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Submission #5

Cas Weinbren

Content creator, modern musician, [Www.epicsound.io](http://www.epicsound.io) and is blessed to be a multimillion streamed modern musician

Caskeyboardproducer@yahoo.com

Cas Weinbren (me) is blessed to be an award winning (NYTopliners 2020), multimillion streamed modern musician, music producer, project manager and advocating for needed new copyright law reform in the age of AI, smartphones, social media, and streaming. This includes advertising and advocating the power of www.muso.ai and the need for the passing of the Protect The Working Musicians Act HR 5576, the Living Wage For Musicians Act HR 7763, the American Music Fairness Act HR 791, the No Fakes Act HR 2794 and the American Royalties Too Act HR 4017 in light of the devastating failed Music Modernization Act due to the \$424 Million+ audit of the MLC by George Clinton and the class action lawsuit against ASCAP and BMI by Alexander C Baker and Adam Bravery as shown.

<https://artistrightswatch.com/2023/12/20/wordsbykristin-the-mlc-being-audited-by-bridgeport-music-company-that-reps-george-clinton-funkadelic/>

<https://www.classaction.org/news/class-action-lawsuit-challenges-ascap-bmi-arbitration-agreements-says-entities-should-be-audited>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5576>

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DKNjEILP10g/?igsh=MXNzc2NkNjFldWNiaQ==>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/4017/text>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/791>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/2794>

Copyright is an investment to begin with, and I think banks should take over the financials as music, film, episodic film, art, writing, theatre are investments to begin with. I am a fan of Mastercard Artist Accelerator program, City National Bank music banking initiative, and Dapper Labs copyright stable coin and gamified branding as shown.

<https://connect.priceless.com/artistaccelerator>

<https://www.cnb.com/industries-we-serve/entertainment/music-entertainment.html>

www.dapperlabs.com

I believe that immoral, corrupt leaderships leads companies to fail and market control and financial opacity will end both companies and careers.

Cas Weinbren, Caskeyboardproducer and See See Beats
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Submission #6

Chirag Patel

Sr. Director, Membership, A2IM

chirag@a2im.org

Chirag Patel is a globally minded music industry executive whose work bridges markets, cultures, and business innovation across India and the United States. With a master's degree in Music Business from NYU, Chirag brings strategic rigor and a forward-thinking perspective to his role as Director of Membership at the American Association of Independent Music (A2IM), where he empowers independent music companies to strengthen their B2B marketing, business development, and go-to-market strategies. Known for building impactful partnerships between copyright owners and key industry stakeholders, his work advances sustainable growth and drives meaningful innovation within the independent sector. An active member of the Recording Academy, Chirag is deeply committed to advocacy and service, supporting the creative community while helping shape a more equitable and globally connected music industry.

Arielle Aslanyan, The Syndicate Entertainment Marketing and PR Agency
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Submission #7

Danny Garcia

CEO, Songtools

danny@songtools.io

I am nominating Danny Garcia, CEO of SongTools and a Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree, for his transformative work in building the future of music marketing infrastructure.

Danny has fundamentally changed the distribution game by solving one of the independent sector's most persistent challenges: the gap between distribution and discovery. Through SongTools, he has pioneered a white-label infrastructure model that allows major distributors—including partners like ONErpm, Symphonic, and Amuse—to offer affordable, vetted growth tools directly within their platforms. This innovation means artists now have immediate access to marketing levers at the exact moment of distribution, rather than as an afterthought.

The scale of this impact is exceptional. SongTools has already powered discovery for over 2.5 million tracks, proving that automated, data-driven marketing can be democratized effectively. By shifting the industry standard from "uploading" to "growing," Danny is redefining the value proposition of modern distribution and empowering the next generation of artists to find their audience.

Andre Do Valle, Songtools
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Submission #8

Dima Budron

Partner, Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp LLP

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Dima Budron is a Partner in Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp LLP's Los Angeles office. In a highly competitive and rapidly evolving music industry, Dima has distinguished herself through exceptional leadership, principled advocacy, and an unwavering commitment to her clients. She has built a reputation for excellence while remaining firmly grounded in her values, earning the trust and respect of artists and industry professionals alike.

Elevated to Partner in just eight years, Dima has emerged as a formidable presence in the music legal landscape. Dima represents a diverse roster of clients, including recording artists, producers, production companies, and other creative professionals. Her practice spans work with legacy and emerging artists alike, as well as iconic American music institutions, including the Ray Charles Foundation. She is particularly committed to representing artists and producers from diverse and historically underrepresented communities, providing strategic legal counsel that enables them to compete and thrive at the highest levels of the music industry.

Dima maintains a hands-on presence in her clients' careers. Her support frequently extends beyond the walls of a corporate office and into recording studios, live performances, music festivals, and backstage environments. By engaging directly with her clients in the spaces where their work comes to life, Dima provides counsel that is both practical and deeply informed by the realities of the modern music business.

Some of her accomplishments include, but are not limited to:

- Ongoing representation of breakout star and Australian musician grentperez in entertainment transactions matters since 2020, when he was just starting his professional music career. At age 12, grentperez posted his first YouTube video, and over time, garnered over 100 million views and 600K subscribers by posting videos of himself playing the guitar and singing covers/original songs. In 2021, he released his debut single "Cherry Wine," which quickly became an international sensation, and earned Gold records in both Australia and the United States. Dima received a Gold record plaque in her name for her contributions to grentperez's career. In 2024, grentperez performed to a packed out crowd at Lollapalooza. He is releasing his debut album and starting his world tour in 2025, which is projected to be a big success. Over the years, Dima has represented grentperez in connection with publishing agreements, recording agreements, promotion and endorsement agreements, and much more.
- Participated in the negotiation of the multimillion dollar sale of a legacy artist's music catalog. Dima managed the due diligence, oversaw the other associates involved with the matter, and liaised with the buyers to make sure they obtained all the information needed to close the deal.

- *****CONFIDENTIAL***** Ongoing representation of American Association of Independent Music (“A2IM”), including in connection with their signature Indie Week and Libera Awards events, Merlin Network, and Jammcard, the “Musician’s Referral Network” startup that counts Quincy Jones among its investors (including in connection with the release of their film entitled Trap Jazz). Dima handles their contracts, agreements, and more.
- *****CONFIDENTIAL***** Assisting in the representation of the Ray Charles Foundation, in connection with multiple projects concerning Ray Charles’ musical legacy. Dima manages the licensing of music in the Foundation’s legacy library and is working on negotiating agreements for the release of new music involving Ray Charles’ music.
- Ongoing representation of Between East LLC, an entertainment and media company that celebrates Middle Eastern & North African (MENA) art, creativity, and culture to reveal a new global identity and provide opportunities to MENA creatives to enter and succeed in the entertainment industry. Dima prepares and negotiates a variety of production and event agreements for Between East, and strategizes with the company regarding growth and development plans to maximize the company’s impact on the community.
- Ongoing representation of successful independent artist, Anees. Known for blending pop, hip-hop, and soulful melodies with introspective, uplifting lyricism. He broke through organically with viral hits like “Sun and Moon,” building a devoted fanbase through authenticity, mental-health-forward themes, and a fully independent approach to his music and career.
- Ongoing representation of a model and influencer that has exploded in fame and notoriety the past year. She has built a growing public profile through her social media presence, where she shares art, fashion, and travel, positioning herself at the intersection of culture and contemporary style.

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Submission #9

Dr. Amatia Golbodaghi

Director, Organization Development, The Guitar Center Company

amatia.golbodaghi@gmail.com

I am honored to nominate Dr. Amatia Golbodaghi for the 2026 #NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch Award. Amatia is a transformative under-40 executive whose work at The Guitar Center Company has delivered measurable business results while reshaping culture, leadership capability, and organizational effectiveness across a 10,000+ employee enterprise.

What distinguishes Amatia is her rare combination of relentless drive, deep humility, and genuine care for people. She challenges convention, takes bold risks, and consistently brings innovative, future-forward ideas to life, yet she leads with empathy, collaboration, and an unwavering belief in the potential of others. Her leadership is both courageous and deeply human.

As a rising leader in the music industry, Amatia has brought a deep understanding of how talent, culture, and capability shape business success across the music retail and live entertainment ecosystem, making her impact at Guitar Center not only transformative for the company but influential to the broader industry.

Amatia has accelerated the Guitar Center Company's transformation by delivering directly on key company OKRs related to talent strategy, leadership readiness, and sales culture. She created and launched the company's first-ever enterprise High-Potential Program, personally pitching the concept to the CEO and CHRO. This program is establishing a scalable leadership pipeline, strengthening internal mobility, and significantly elevating organizational bench strength during a critical period of growth and change.

She also played a pivotal role in building the Contact Center and Guitar Center Retail product and sales training programs from the ground up, developing the team, creating training content, establishing program structures, and implementing essential tools for hiring, capability development, and performance management. Her work bridged the gap between corporate talent strategy and frontline sales execution, ensuring training, culture, and results remained tightly aligned.

Although her role sits within Human Resources, Amatia consistently transcends the traditional boundaries of HR. She operates as a business leader first, driving revenue impact, operational improvement, and cultural transformation in ways rarely seen within HR functions. Her work has strengthened leadership capability, improved sales consistency, and fueled a more results-driven culture across the enterprise.

Her achievements highlight her ability to drive meaningful business outcomes:

- Store Grand Opening Training Program: Led an initiative that drove a 150 percent increase in lessons, generated \$5,000 in added sales, improved gear insurance attachment rates by 20 percent, and supported five store openings with a scalable “Train the Trainer” model.
- Contact Center Sales Training Program: Designed an eight-week program that delivered an 80% improvement in turnover.
- Category Sales Strategy: Built eLearning for more than 3,000 employees that drove a 40% lift in drum sales.
- Led DE&I initiatives including ERGs, allyship programming, and inclusive policy design that strengthened representation, belonging, and cultural maturity company wide.

Beyond her accomplishments, it is who Amatia is that makes her extraordinary. She is a truth-teller with heart, someone who uplifts others, challenges with compassion, and creates psychological safety rooted in respect and authenticity. She brings out the best in people while simultaneously driving the business forward, and her influence extends beyond Guitar Center through her service as an advisor to the University of San Francisco Women in Leadership Program, where she helps develop and inspire the next generation of female leaders.

Amatia is actively shaping the future of the music retail industry and redefining what leadership looks like within it. Her innovation, measurable impact, and people-centered leadership make her exactly the kind of next-generation executive this award is meant to honor. She is unquestionably one to watch.

Annette Holtzman, The Guitar Center Company
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Submission #10

Emmaline McCourt

Director, Membership, A2IM

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Emmaline McCourt is a respected leader within the independent music community, with over 15 years of experience supporting artists and companies across the global music ecosystem. Her career spans influential organizations including Qobuz, Mute, Beggars Group, and Forced Exposure, where she contributed to the success of a diverse roster of artists such as Radiohead, M83, Yo La Tengo, Jamie xx, Kamasi Washington, The National, and Parquet Courts. At the American Association of Independent Music (A2IM), Emmaline manages the organization's diverse membership and leads its flagship mentorship program, which has provided professional development and career pathways for more than 700 employees from member companies. In addition to her work at A2IM, she serves on the Recording Academy's New York Chapter Member Engagement Committee, underscoring her commitment to fostering community, education, and the next generation of music industry leaders.

Arielle Aslanyan, The Syndicate Entertainment Marketing and PR Agency
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Submission #11

Emmie Chambers

Director Of Operations, Primary Wave & Sun Label Group

echambers@primarywave.com

Thank you so much for taking the time to view my video and written submission for Emmie Chambers to be nominated for the #NEXTGEN_NOW ONE TO WATCH award. My name is Emma Bosworth, I am Emmie Chamber's Operations Coordinator at Primary Wave and Sun Label Group. I truly believe that Emmie is a stellar representative of all this award encompasses. Emmie heads the distribution of both physical and digital products along with the migration of all catalogs purchased by Primary Wave and Sun Label Group. She has helped countless others including myself to grow in this industry through her tenacity and passion for music. She is an exemplary woman who continues to fight for women's space within this business. Below I have outlined some of her accomplishments along with a couple of articles that highlight how talented she is. Thank you so much for your time and I hope you will consider Emmie Chambers for this award and recognition.

Accomplishments within Primary Wave and Sun Label Group

- Emmie has spearheaded the production and successful release of over 90 vinyl products since she started in 2022.
- She has pitched and successfully led the production of over 20 Record Store Day titles, implementing her own pitching process raising our acceptance rate by over 3 times.
- She was promoted to Operations Director within her first 5 years in the industry at only 28 years old.
- She has implemented the transition of many iconic catalogs including the likes of Olivia Newton-John, Sun Records, Lucinda Williams, Neil Sedaka, Three Dog Night, etc.

VIDEO: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RxJPWsSB7XkCfqxYM5oh8W31KiTyX5Xp/view?usp=sharing>

<https://womeninvinyl.com/profiles/melissa-chambers-emmie-chambers-head-of-production-gaither-music-group-llc-production-for-primary-wave-sun-records>

<https://www.hitsdailydouble.com/news/rumor-mill/noisemakers-lessbrgreaterin-good-company>

Emma Bosworth, Primary Wave & Sun Label Group
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Submission #12

Erica Buchi

VP of Digital and Partnerships, mtheory

erica@mtheory.com

Erica Buchi is such an integral part of mtheory's success. She's worked at various roles in the company, but her current role as VP of Digital and Partnerships, means she is the one that handles all of our DSP connections, and does it with such grace and professionalism. We have heard from multiple DSP partners that if they know Erica is on the account, they know it's going to be handled well. They've even joked that she sometimes knows their platforms more than they do! But in addition to managing DSP partnerships, she also helps us manage brand partnerships, pitches performance opportunities that come her way, pitches sync opportunities that come her way, and more! mtheory works with clients across all genres, and at various stages of their careers, so their needs vary and she is able to effectively assess what works best for each client. She's also involved with lots of organizations across the industry, including CMA and ACM.

Tiffany Provenzano, mtheory
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Submission #13

Erin Moorman

VP of Marketing, Syntax Creative

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Erin joined Syntax Creative in 2022 and advanced quickly, not because she was pushed forward, but because she earned trust. She moved from Marketing Coordinator to Senior Director of Marketing and now to Vice President of Marketing by taking ownership, making sound decisions, and following through. Each step came with more responsibility, and she handled it.

She currently owns release strategy and marketing operations across more than 150 independent record labels. That includes managing relationships with major digital service providers and commercial partners, directing campaign planning and execution, and building internal systems that actually work. She operates with autonomy because she has shown she can be trusted to do so.

What stands out most about Erin is her judgment. She makes clear decisions, communicates directly, and does not rely on chaos or last-minute heroics to get things done. She builds structure, holds herself accountable, and expects the same from the people around her. That combination is rare at any age.

She also understands artists because she has been one. Erin started songwriting at a young age, performed, and organized music events. That background shows up in how she approaches marketing. The work exists to serve the music and the people making it, not to distract from them.

Outside of Syntax, Erin is already contributing to the broader industry. She is a graduate of Leadership Bluegrass, serves on the Leadership Bluegrass committee that selects future classes, participates in committees with the Gospel Music Association and The Recording Academy, and is a member of The Recording Academy. She does not wait for permission or to be invited. She shows up and contributes.

At 25, Erin carries real executive responsibility with consistency and discipline. She is not a future leader. She is a current one.

https://musicbiz.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/265-d84e78dcd651f598a7c92f45582f536a/2026/01/1623429884601.jpg

Timothy Trudeau, Syntax Creative
tim.trudeau@syntaxcreative.com | 619-928-4586

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Submission #14

Forbs West

Programming Specialist, Pandora/SiriusXM

forbs.west@siriusxm.com

I'm nominating Forbs West for this #NEXTGEN_NOW Award because, having worked with him for several years while a program director at Pandora, Forbs embodied momentum, innovation and creativity in every aspect of his work. His work ethic, his ability to effectively communicate and creatively execute ideas is exceptional, especially since he was finishing up his master's degree while working full-time. He's always looking ahead to what's next and coming up with new ideas to get there now, all while delivering with the highest skill level the objectives on the table.

Melissa Chalos, MRC Artist Advisory
melissariddlechalos@gmail.com | 16154824456

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Submission #15

Hannah Thompson-Waite

SVP, Commercial Marketing, US, Virgin Music Group

hannah.waite@virginmusic.com

As an out queer woman, Hannah Thompson-Waite's professional and philanthropic work is deeply informed by a commitment to amplifying queer voices and ensuring creative and economic systems within the music industry work for artists as they are—not as they are expected to be.

Throughout her career, Hannah has been drawn to working with artists who challenge convention and embrace authenticity, including queer artists whose work has had outsized cultural impact. Her leadership on projects such as Tove Lo's *Dirt Femme* and *HEAT*, as well as St. Vincent's *All Born Screaming* reflects a deliberate alignment between creative vision and commercial strategy—ensuring that bold, queer-forward artistry is not treated as niche, but supported at scale.

Tove Lo, a celebrated figure within the LGBTQ+ community, has long centered queerness, sexual fluidity, and non-normative narratives in her music. Hannah's work on *Dirt Femme* and *HEAT* focused on building a streaming strategy that honored that identity rather than smoothing it for mass appeal, supporting a project that resonated deeply with queer audiences while maintaining global commercial reach. This approach reflects Hannah's broader philosophy: authenticity is not a liability in modern music ecosystems, but a strength when properly championed.

Similarly, Hannah worked with St. Vincent on her critically acclaimed, three-time Grammy Award-winning album *All Born Screaming*—a project led by an artist who has become a defining queer icon in rock music. St. Vincent's public embrace of fluid identity, creative multiplicity, and artistic autonomy mirrors the values Hannah brings to her work as an executive: creating space for artists to evolve on their own terms, while ensuring their work is fully supported within a streaming-first industry.

Hannah has overseen commercial strategy for projects spanning pop, indie, K-pop, rock, hip-hop, and more, including releases from Tove Lo (*Dirt Femme*), St. Vincent (*All Born Screaming*), Clairo (*Charm*), Joji (*Piss In The Wind*), James Blake (*Trying Times*), Freddie Gibbs & The Alchemist (*Alfredo 2*), STRAY KIDS (*KARMA*), King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard (*Phantom Island*), Kevin Abstract (*BLUSH*), Amyl & The Sniffers (*Cartoon Darkness*), Tom Odell (*Black Friday + A Wonderful Life*), Mac DeMarco (*Guitar*), and Hannah Cohen (*Earthstar Mountain*).

This same commitment extends beyond Hannah's professional role into her nonprofit leadership. As a founding board member and Head of Partnerships at Queer Capita, she helped build an organization dedicated to addressing structural funding and access gaps for queer creators and entrepreneurs. Her work connecting Queer Capita with labels, artists, and digital platforms—and helping raise over \$50,000 in early funding—reflects a belief that representation alone is not enough; equitable access to capital and opportunity is essential for lasting change.

Taken together, Hannah’s career reflects a cohesive vision: using her position within the industry to expand who is heard, who is supported, and who is able to succeed—creatively, culturally, and economically. Her work demonstrates how commercial leadership, philanthropy, and lived experience can align to create meaningful, forward-looking impact across the music business.

Nicole Resnikoff, Virgin Music Group
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Submission #16

Jacob Merrithew

Owner/CEO, Merrithew Music Co.

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I am nominating Jacob Merrithew for the #NEXTGEN_NOW “One To Watch” Award because he exemplifies the next generation of music leaders who use their talent to make a real-world impact. At just 23 years old, Jacob has created and independently released the song “988,” a powerful track dedicated to mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

What sets Jacob apart is not only his musical ability but his commitment to using music as a platform for social good. 988 has resonated with thousands of listeners, sparking conversations about mental health, reducing stigma, and directing people toward the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for help. Beyond the song, Jacob has driven a movement around this message, engaging his audience through social media, lyric videos, and community outreach.

Jacob demonstrates remarkable leadership, creativity, and initiative as an independent artist. He manages all aspects of his music career, from songwriting to production to promotion, all while keeping a clear focus on inspiring and supporting his listeners. His work reflects both artistic talent and a deep sense of responsibility to positively influence others — the hallmark of a true Next Gen leader.

For these reasons, I strongly believe Jacob Merrithew is an ideal candidate for the #NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch Award, representing innovation, social impact, and the promise of the next generation in music.

This song helped save my life:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/2briKU4NdfkLeXdxRUYMH0?si=7y3xolqbRr6ibPAxBrkFMQ>

Haylee Hubbard, Merrithew Music Co
hayleehubbard0826@gmail.com | 2089700918

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Submission #17

Jacqueline Cerra

Urban Beat Wave, PR Agent

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Jacq is so unique to work with. Being so young and yet having a very grown up aura, which is a vague description if depicted as that. The talent Jacq displays is nothing but extraordinary, with Jacq's Ethics, and works in meticulous calculations. Jacq's involvement with the business of Urban Beat Wave, a company of 100 artist Charting. You can see even as of recently jacq has acquired plaques from billboard and iTunes. Her qualifications are none the less certified for this nomination.

Marxx, Urban Beat Wave
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Submission #18

Jill Wheeler

International Business & Label Development Manager, Redeye Worldwide

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Jill Wheeler is Redeye's International Business & Label Development Manager and is responsible for managing a dedicated roster of Redeye labels, including Beggars Group (Matador, XL, 4AD, Rough Trade, Young), Domino, Fire Talk, Double Double Whammy, Tru Thoughts and Hyperdub. She serves as the primary point of contact, working closely to plan long-term strategies for new releases, catalog management, and major events. She also works closely with the Head of Business & Label Development with a focus on the UK and EU to help identify rights expansion opportunities with current partners and making new connections for future partnerships to support the overall goals of growing the business in those markets. Jill moved to London from NYC last summer to take on her new role on the Business Development team, and immediately took on the task of meeting current label partners, prospective labels and management. Jill has an intuitive approach when it comes to building relationships, being a strong communicator and putting in the hard work into the evening hours to work with her US colleagues.

Some highlights of Jill's recent work collaborating with our label partners include: Wet Leg, where she led many aspects of the the retail campaign, including setup of over 100 in-store listening events ahead of release with exclusive merch, This Is Lorelei's (Nate Amos from Water From Your Eyes) two releases in the past 12 months, and the new highly anticipated album from Robyn.

Here is some direct feedback that was received about Jill around a Wet Leg release: "Just this week, she took immediate action when a critical issue arose with a high-profile release, handling the situation with remarkable composure and focus. This isn't unusual for Jill! I've seen it time and time again: she consistently demonstrates her ability to stay calm under pressure and remain steadfastly solutions-oriented. Her dedication to providing exceptional customer service is just as impressive. Jill works closely with her labels to understand their needs and deliver within what's achievable. Her approach has earned trust amongst her labels, fostering very strong partnerships. This has led to process improvements at several of her labels, which has in turn resulted in a significant reduction in data errors and much fewer last-minute changes."

As Jill's role is a bit of a hybrid between working directly with a handful of labels on campaigns and searching for new business, she has a very unique perspective that she's able to share on a micro-level with labels but also an overall knowledge of distribution and particularly, how Redeye's business works. She understands the business, and her personality is a great benefit to her role: Jill has the instinct to build trust with people on a human and business level that can lead to success for everyone involved.

Darin Soler, Exceleration/Redeye
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Submission #19

Josh Baker

Founder and Director, Syntho Hub Ltd

j@synthohub.com

Josh Baker, founder of Syntho Hub Ltd, is a driving force behind digital innovation in modern music education. A respected UK house artist, doing over 9 million month streams on Spotify as an artist as well as two top 100 UK hits in 2025, Josh launched Syntho five years ago with a clear mission: to make high-quality electronic music production education accessible to anyone, anywhere, through cutting-edge digital technology. What began as a bootstrapped passion project has grown into a profitable, global platform that is reshaping how producers learn and enter the music industry.

Josh's deep understanding of both the creative and commercial sides of the industry uniquely positions him as an innovator. Recognising that traditional music education often fails to meet the needs of electronic music producers, he designed Syntho as a digitally native learning ecosystem. Under his leadership, the platform has developed structured, modular Ableton courses tailored specifically to house music, alongside interactive feedback systems and an active global community. These innovations have streamlined the learning curve and empowered thousands of aspiring artists to create polished, label-ready music.

Josh's hands-on approach ensures Syntho continually evolves. He draws directly from his experience as a touring DJ and producer to identify gaps in the industry and translate them into intuitive digital solutions. His commitment to practicality and accessibility has enabled students to secure label signings, receive major DJ support, and build sustainable careers—clear evidence of his impact on the modern music landscape.

What distinguishes Josh as a digital innovator is not just his ability to harness technology, but his vision for democratising music education. By combining real industry insight with scalable digital tools, he has created a platform that lowers barriers, nurtures talent, and advances the future of electronic music.

Josh Baker is not only the founder of Syntho, he is a catalyst for digital transformation in the global music industry.

https://musicbiz.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/265-d84e78dcd651f598a7c92f45582f536a/2025/11/JB-Headshot-1.jpg

Hazel Savage, Syntho Hub Ltd
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Submission #20

Kelsy Lartius Miguel

Managing Partner, Kelzana Management

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It is my honor to nominate Kelsy Lartius Miguel, Managing Partner of Kelzana Management, for the Music Biz Association Next Gen Now One to Watch Award.

Kelsy established herself as a dedicated leader and community builder within the Denver music industry just over two years ago, in her mid-twenties. Recognizing a crucial need for local support, she founded the Colorado Music Industry Alliance in 2023. That same year, she launched Kelzana Management, offering essential services in artist management, consulting, and social media. Kelsy's core strengths include music and marketing data analysis, strategic planning, targeted digital marketing, and leveraging technology to foster career growth. She also maintains active roles in the regional Recording Academy and the Denver Women In Music chapters.

Working alongside her partner, Tori Norman-Castillo (who I have also nominated), they've grown their company quickly. They work closely with several of our artists here at Label 51 Recordings (including Deep Blue Something, Triptides, Brie Stoner, and Matt Von Roderick). I have watched them earn the trust of these artists to help cultivate their respective brands online. Furthermore, Kelsy and Tori have been brought on as consultants for this year's #Happens Radio Convention in Las Vegas for the first time. They accomplish all of this while simultaneously managing their own roster of musicians.

Both Kelsy and Tori are equally impressive and talented young women, still not yet 30, and they are definitely ones to watch rise in the music business, whether separately or as partners.

Dee Ann Metzger, Label 51 Recordings
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Submission #21

Nicki Shamel

Head of TuneCore, U.S., TuneCore

nicole.shamel@tunecore.com

Nicki Shamel is Head of TuneCore, U.S. and embodies the qualities that define the next generation of music industry leadership - she's strategic, artist-first, and deeply knowledgeable about the digital ecosystem that shapes modern careers.

Since stepping into her role at TuneCore, Shamel has helped sharpen the company's focus on artist development, aligning its Artist Relations and DSP Partnerships teams to deliver scalable, data-driven opportunities for independent artists at every stage of their careers. She and her team ensure artists have access not only to distribution, but to actionable insights, marketing support, and growth pathways traditionally reserved for major-label acts. A champion of TuneCore's suite of products and services including TuneCore Accelerator and TuneCore's Advanced Trends and Analytics, Shamel translates platform relationships and data analytics into real-world outcomes for independent creators.

Prior to joining TuneCore, Shamel held multiple titles at AWAL, most recently serving as Senior Vice President (2020-2024), where she built and scaled the Global Commercial Partnerships team from the ground up and oversaw a 200% increase in monthly AWAL streams in her first two years at the company. There, she spearheaded the company's digital strategy across major DSPs including Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube Music, and Amazon Music, elevating artists' visibility while strengthening AWAL's market positioning. During her tenure, Shamel played a pivotal role in supporting the careers of artists such as Laufey, Jungle, and Little Simz, highlighting her artist-centric, globally minded approach.

Shamel began her career in digital marketing at Primary Wave before spending seven years at Sony Music in international marketing and sales roles where she developed a keen understanding of global campaign execution and cross-market strategy. Across each chapter of her career, Shamel has demonstrated a consistent ability to anticipate shifts in the digital landscape and translate them into meaningful opportunities for both artists and organizations.

What sets Nicki apart as the #NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch is not only her résumé, but her impact. A connector between artists and platforms, data and creativity, strategy and execution, her work helps redefine how independent artists are supported, how success is measured, and how music companies can scale while remaining artist-first.

A true leader, Nicki Shamel is absolutely one to watch. Her track record in the industry along with her immediate impact at TuneCore exemplify the drive, dedication and devotion to artists that elevate her amongst her peers as one of the most important young executives currently working in independent music, and very deserving of the #NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch Award.

Christina Hankin, TuneCore
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Submission #22

Nonafaye Williams

Sr. Director, Product Management, Hopeless Records

nonafaye@hopelessrecords.com

Nonafaye Williams is a rising star in the independent label community, having worked at indie labels for the past 16 years, and leading/spearheading marketing campaigns for 3x platinum selling artists like Pierce The Veil and several #1 rock radio campaigns (I Prevail, The Pretty Reckless). For the past three years, Nonafaye has been the lead product manager at Hopeless Records, breaking artists in the active rock radio space - securing the first two Top 15 singles in Hopeless history (Fame On Fire, Autumn Kings, Point North) and overseeing creative/interactive marketing campaigns for the next generation (NOAHFINNCE, Sweet Pill, LØLØ). Last year, Nonafaye led the marketing for the Hopeless Records 30th Anniversary, including an immersive event at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

This year, A2IM selected Nonafaye as part of the 2025 A2IM Rising 20 list that highlights emerging industry talent. She is a candidate for the incoming class of the Music Biz Board. As a first generation college graduate and a Filipino-American woman, Nonafaye has been an incredible mentor for the predominantly female / non binary staff at Hopeless Records, and a strong leader in the Marketing community.

Erin Choi, Hopeless Records
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Submission #23

Ross Sroda

Marketing & Platforms, Warner Music Group

ross.sroda@wmg.com

Incredible listening parties, record store crawl, Deftones campaign & great communicator!

Andy Nelson, Easy Street
andy@easystreetonline.com | 615-479-3349

Ross has lead over 1,000 listening parties in 2025 alone. He's hosted very successful and well attended private listening events. All these events have created excitements and sales. Beyond just working w a team of mentors and well regarded execs at WEA, he has become one of them, while understanding and representing his generation while creating a symbiotic relationship w all aerations and eras of music. His communication and marketing ideas are top notch high level. His enthusiasm and professionalism has helped build and create one of the greatest marketing departments in the biz. His Record Store Day Crawl's have been great events that took an immense amount of scheduling and detail.

<https://westseattleblog.com/event/the-deftones-listening-party-at-easy-street-records/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DNgixFlh6Or/>

<https://ticket.warnermusic.com/event/record-store-crawl-seattle>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@easystreetrecords/photo/7574522750258171150?lang=en>

matt vaughan, easy street records
matt@easystreetonline.com | 206-229-5680

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Submission #24

Tiffany Provenzano

Executive Director, Equal Access, Equal Access

tiffany@mtheory.com

Tiffany Provenzano is a music-industry veteran and equity champion whose work spans major-label experience, nonprofit leadership, and pioneering efforts to make country music more inclusive. With roots in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a graduate of the University of Miami, Tiffany built a foundation in artist development and music strategy that would carry her through nearly a decade in New York City's major-label ecosystem — working across various roles within the Warner Music Group and its affiliated labels.

In 2018, she relocated to Nashville, where she further broadened her impact by shifting into nonprofit-driven civic engagement. In that time, she led operations at The Equity Alliance, a local nonprofit focused on civic engagement and equity across Tennessee — deepening her commitment to social justice and community empowerment outside the music world.

In 2022, Tiffany took on a groundbreaking role as the Founding Executive Director of mtheory's Equal Access Program, an initiative designed to provide artists and managers from historically underrepresented backgrounds in country music with financial resources, training, mentorship, and access to industry networks. Under her leadership, Equal Access has become one of the first structured programs actively working to dismantle systemic barriers in the country-music industry.

Tiffany has helped the program secure funding, engage sponsors, and build strong industry partnerships — enabling cohort participants to connect with top-tier labels, agents, media companies, and DSPs. Through these efforts, many artists and managers have achieved their dreams of releasing new music, becoming full time entrepreneurs, executing their creative visions, and playing on nationally acclaimed stages.

Today, Tiffany marries her extensive music-industry background in marketing, strategy, and artist development with a deep personal commitment to equity and community. Her work seeks not just to open doors, but to transform structures — creating a more inclusive and equitable future for country music by lifting up voices that have too often been overlooked. Tiffany is known in the industry as a tireless advocate for inclusion — someone who frames success not just in terms of commercial outcomes, but as a shift in who gets to belong, create, and lead in country music.

Outside of her professional life, Tiffany is a proud mom to two little girls who keep her inspired, grounded, and joyful every day. She's also an adventurer at heart — having climbed both Machu Picchu and Mount Kilimanjaro — and she gravitates toward challenges that are hard but ultimately worth it. Whether in her career, her advocacy work, or her personal pursuits, Tiffany is driven by a deep belief in pushing boundaries, expanding what's possible, and leading with purpose.

Tiffany Provenzano, mtheory / Equal Access
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Submission #25

Tori Norman-Castillo

Managing Partner, Kelzana Management

Victoria@kelzananamgmt.com

I'm happy to nominate Victoria "Tori" Norman-Castillo, Managing Partner of Kelzana Management, for the Music Biz Association Next Gen Now One to Watch Award.

Tori is a natural storyteller with deep roots in the indie music scene. Her professional journey began in Spain, working at a record label while earning her Master's degree, followed by a return to New York to create essential and unique performance opportunities for indie artists. With strong skills in video production, she excels at guiding artists to discover their authentic voice and cultivate their brand.

Since joining Kelzana in 2024, Tori and her partner, Kelsy Lartius Miguel (whom I have also nominated), have quickly grown their company. They now work closely with several of our artists here at Label 51 Recordings (including Deep Blue Something, Triptides, Brie Stoner, and Matt Von Roderick). We have watched them gain the trust of these artists, helping them to build their respective online brands. Additionally, for the first time this year, Tori and Kelsy have been brought on as consultants for the #Happens Radio Convention in Las Vegas. They accomplish all of this while also managing their own roster of musicians.

Both still not quite the age of 30, Kelsy and Tori are equally impressive and talented young women. Whether working together or separately, they are undoubtedly ones to watch as they continue to rise in the music business.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vGNv2eiXpFoMxpUE6i1YzhySmUlyHuVe/view>

Dee Ann Metzger, Label 51 Recordings
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Submission #26

Trevor Perkins

CEO/Founder, Perk PR & Creative Agency

trevor@perkpr.co

I'm nominating Trevor Perkins for the #NEXTGEN_NOW One To Watch Award because he represents exactly what the next generation of leaders looks like.... driven, innovative, and deeply committed to growth. Trevor consistently shows up with purpose, pushing ideas forward while uplifting the people around him. His work ethic, creative vision, and ability to adapt in a rapidly changing landscape set him apart as someone who isn't just following trends, but shaping what's next.

Nicole Lewis, One Spark Entertainment
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