

billboard Country Update

BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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Surprise Me: How Unexpected Efforts Grow Country's Fan Base And Evolve The Format

Surprise!

When **Morgan Wallen** dropped a new song on Dec. 30, the move came as a *double* surprise. For starters, the world hadn't known it was on the way, and "Smile" gave his fans an unexpected bonus to start off 2025. Additionally, the video followed a plot in which Wallen gave fictitious TV producers an unwelcome surprise, performing "Smile" for an in-studio audience when the rundown — and the teleprompter — were queued up for "Love Somebody."

In the process, Wallen toyed with one of the keys to a successful music career: the art of surprise. It can take all kinds of forms, be it an unpromoted album release, such as **Eric Church's** 2015 project *Mr. Misunderstood*; an unannounced concert walk-on, as when **Willie Nelson** appeared onstage during an Oct. 11 performance by **Chris Stapleton** in Austin; or a simple fashion decision, a la **Dolly Parton's** Dallas Cowboys cheerleader outfit during a Thanksgiving 2023 halftime show.

"We're in a world where click bait is everything," independent artist **Chris Housman** says. "If you're watching a movie, you want to be shocked, too. I think it applies to music."

The word "surprise" is rarely used in connection with a creative target in country music, though surprises often fuel

the genre's songs. The hesitation when **Megan Moroney** says, "Wait," in the middle of "Am I Okay?" is a head-turner the first time a listener hears it. The tight, in-your-face harmonies in **Dan + Shay's** "Speechless" carried a level of surprise when that song arrived in 2018. And the odd use of the fishing-related noun "spinner bait" as a verb in **Justin Moore's** current "Time's

Ticking" has a what-did-I-hear value that subtly encourages fans to lean in further to decipher the story.

"I've had songs in the past where you look at the title and you think it's going to be one thing, and then it turns out to be something completely different," Moore says. "I

always like that, when songs surprise you."

Not everyone does. Radio programmers have operated for decades under the belief that most of their audience is looking for songs they already know they like. When they're surprised with a new song, they tend to want one that sounds like it already belongs — either the voice is familiar or the general sound of the music fits with what they already know.

"That's what we're all chasing, is that fine line of something that's special and shocking, but also familiar to the fans that we've already cultivated," **Carly Pearce** says. "How do we make new fans? How do we stretch it within the margins of



BALDRIDGE



PEARCE



MOORE

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BALDRIDGE: ROBBY KLEIN; PEARCE: ALLISTER ANN; MOORE: CODY VILLALOBOS

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our artistry? I mean, I think about it all the time: How do I elevate but still keep the base?”

Collaborations often create surprise, allowing both artists to maintain their sound while they develop a joint presence, as Pearce discovered in duet singles with Stapleton, **Lee Brice** and **Ashley McBryde**. Cover songs can do that, too — particularly when they’re not obvious. **Tigirlily Gold**, for example, has caught fans off guard by segueing from “Blonde” into “9 to 5” during concerts, while **Drew Baldridge** has occasionally slid **Dua Lipa**’s most unlikely “Levitating” into his set list.

“People are like, ‘What is happening? This country dude is singing some pop song?’” Baldridge says. “That’s really fun. With our set, we try to throw in some songs that people wouldn’t expect some big country boy to do.”

Streaming platforms and social media have built much of their models around the idea of providing subscribers a steady flow of new content — surprises that, thanks to algorithms built to determine users’ tastes, are designed to land favorably.

Streaming has, as the industry knows well, put a major dent in albums’ popularity, and some of that shift is a result of artists uploading a steady flow of new music that feeds fans’ demand for content. Thus, artists now provide surprises to their audience on a regular basis. But in the process, particularly when those songs are advance releases that tease upcoming projects, they take away some of the unknowns that were historically part of the album experience.

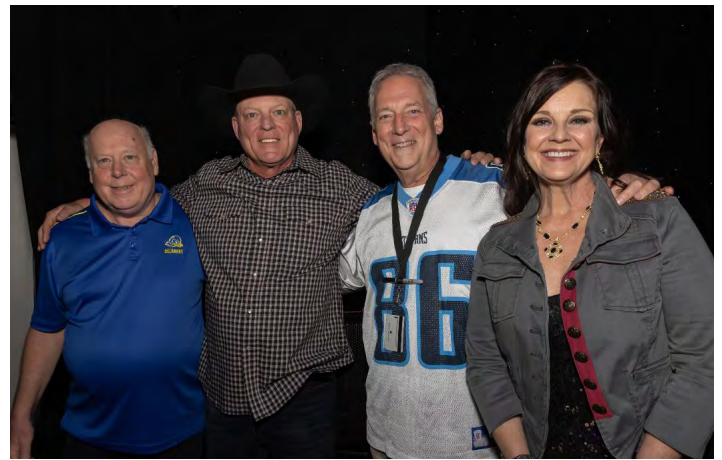
“Back in the day, when the Eric Church record would come out, you would go to the store and buy it,” **Dylan Marlowe** recalls. “You had no idea what was on it, and that was the coolest part to me.”

Thus, those tracks pushed out in advance of an album might bring attention to the project, but releasing too many might actually prove detrimental.

“I think it gives it a shorter shelf life,” Marlowe suggests. “There’s just no surprise. You’ve heard [some of the songs] a million times before you’ve even heard it.”

Heavy repetition is desirable — more performances equal higher royalties — but it also changes the effect of the music. When **Little Big Town** released “Pontoon” in 2012, the odd sound of the opening instrumental riff — a stinging combination of mandolin and a programmed keyboard — was such a cool surprise that listeners wanted to hear it over and over. But as the song aged, that repetition changed the riff from an edgy, sonic curveball to a comfortable mainstream offering. It’s that constant evolution, from fresh and surprising to familiar and safe, that continues to challenge music makers to find new ways to spark listeners’ imaginations.

“If the surprise is the same surprise over and over again, people are going to get bored,” says songwriter **Laura Veltz** (“The Bones,” “What If I Never Get Over You”). “You can’t say the same joke over and over again, right? But as a creator, my job is to create a new surprise. Every single time new music is released, the game changes. We have to ebb and flow. That’s the job; that’s the game.” ●



SAM KERRIGAN

John Michael Montgomery headlined two shows on Jan. 20 during **StarVista LIVE**’s 11th annual Country Music Cruise. From left: **StarVista LIVE** president **Mike Jason**, **Montgomery**, **Campbell** Entertainment owner **Craig Campbell** and Country Music Cruise host **Nan Kelley**.



Easton Corbin and opening act **Tori Martin** smiled for the camera on Jan. 17 when they performed at **Pat Green**’s **The Rustic** in Houston.



Jon Pardi joined **Apple Music** Country host **Kelleigh Bannen** on the Jan. 17 edition of **Today**’s **Country Music**.

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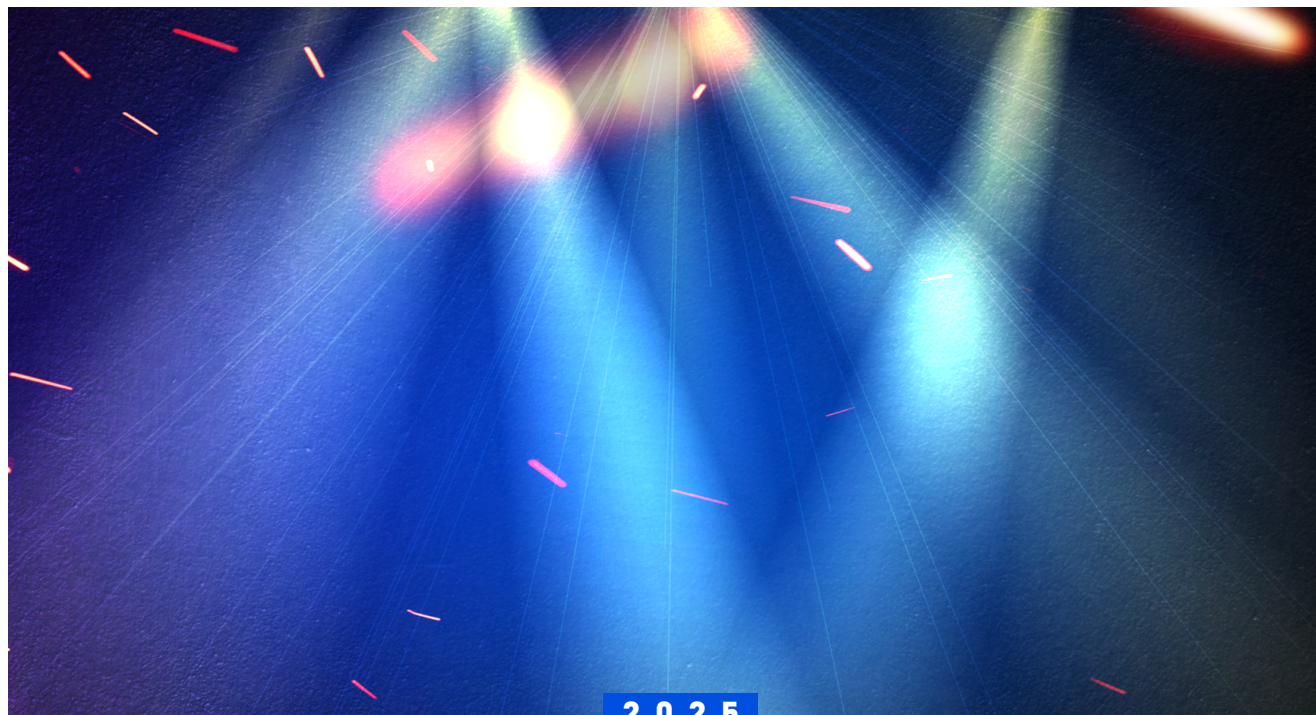
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Expert insight and commentary by **Tom Roland** and **Jim Asker**



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2025

SPORTS & MUSIC ISSUE

Billboard will publish its second Sports & Music issue on Feb. 8, 2025.

This annual issue will examine and highlight the intersection of the sports and music worlds and feature a list of the most influential Power Players who lead both industries as determined by *Billboard* staff.

To be a part of this timely coverage and reach the burgeoning sports and music sector, we hope you will consider an ad in this special issue. Space is available at all budget levels.

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ISSUE DATE 2/8 | AD CLOSE 1/28 | MATERIALS DUE 1/30

billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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ON THE CHARTS JIM ASKER jim.asker@billboard.com

Morgan Wallen Scores Sweet 16th Country Airplay No. 1 With 'Love Somebody'

Morgan Wallen earns his 16th No. 1 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart as "Love Somebody" (Mercury/Republic/Big Loud) lifts a spot to the top of the tally dated Feb. 1. The song, which he co-wrote, increased by 9% to 33.8 million audience impressions Jan. 17-23, according to Luminate.

Dating to his first Country Airplay No. 1, "Up Down" (featuring Florida Georgia Line), in June 2018, the Sneedville, Tenn., native boasts the most leaders, surpassing Luke Combs' 15 in that span.

Wallen logged five Country Airplay No. 1s during 2024, giving him the honor of becoming the first artist to bank that many in a single year in the survey's 35-year history. "Lies Lies Lies" led for one week last November, following "Cowgirls" (featuring Ernest; one week, July), Post Malone's "I Had Some Help" (featuring Wallen; four weeks, June-July), "Man Made a Bar" (featuring Eric Church; one, April) and Thomas Rhett's "Mamaw's House" (featuring Wallen; one, March).

"Love Somebody"—which debuted at No. 1 on the multimetric Hot Country Songs chart and the all-genre Billboard Hot 100 in November—"Lies Lies Lies" and Wallen's latest single, "Smile," are all stand-alone singles so far, ahead of his newly announced forthcoming album, *I'm the Problem*. "Smile" ascends 37-35 on the latest Country Airplay chart (3.5 million, up 24%).

A 'DAMN GOOD' WEEK Riley Green adds his fifth Country Airplay top 10 as "Damn Good Day To Leave" (Nashville Harbor) rises 11-10, up 12% to 16.3 million in audience. He earned his second No. 1 as featured on Ella Langley's "You Look Like You Love Me," which ruled the tally for one week in December. He last reached the top 10 as a lead artist with "Different 'Round Here" (featuring Luke Combs), which hit No. 2 in February 2024. ●



CAMERON BAIRD

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE

TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN (IN MILLIONS)
LIAR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+3.600
LOVE SOMEBODY Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+2.683
4X4XU Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	+2.184
DAMN GOOD DAY TO LEAVE Nashville Harbor	Riley Green	+1.725
WEREN'T FOR THE WIND SAWGOD/Columbia/Triple Tigers	Ella Langley	+1.602
THIS TOWN'S BEEN TOO GOOD TO US Curb	Dylan Scott	+1.595
TOUGH PEOPLE Patoka Sounds/Lyric Ridge/Stoney Creek	Drew Baldrige	+1.584
I NEVER LIE Leo33	Zach Top	+1.578
I AIN'T SAYIN' MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+1.479
I'M GONNA LOVE YOU CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/Capitol Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson & Carrie Underwood	+1.313

MOST INCREASED PLAYS

TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN
LIAR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+800
LOVE SOMEBODY Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+764
DAMN GOOD DAY TO LEAVE Nashville Harbor	Riley Green	+602
4X4XU Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	+584
I NEVER LIE Leo33	Zach Top	+464
WEREN'T FOR THE WIND SAWGOD/Columbia/Triple Tigers	Ella Langley	+459
I'M GONNA LOVE YOU CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/Capitol Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson & Carrie Underwood	+399
AM I OKAY? Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	+334
I AIN'T SAYIN' MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+327
THIS TOWN'S BEEN TOO GOOD TO US Curb	Dylan Scott	+305

RECURRENTS

THIS WEEK	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	TOTAL AUD. (IN MILLIONS)
1	POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	20.312
2	I AM NOT OKAY Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	19.290
3	COWBOY SONGS RECORDS Nashville	George Birge	17.587
4	I HAD SOME HELP Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen	17.472
5	WIND UP MISSIN' YOU Back Blocks/EMI Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	13.461
6	MILES ON IT Joytime Collective/RCA Nashville	Marshmello & Kane Brown	12.904
7	LIES LIES LIES Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	12.451
8	COWGIRLS Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen Featuring ERNEST	10.983
9	WORLD ON FIRE RCA Nashville	Nate Smith	10.305
10	CHEVROLET Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch Featuring Jelly Roll	9.811



TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING JANUARY 23, 2025

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-
1	2	16	FRIDAY NIGHT (Independent) ★★1 Week at 1★★	Wade Bowen	1618	32	11	12	11	WHOSE TEQUILA ARE YOU DRINKIN' (Get Joe)	Billie Jo Jones	1101	95
2	3	30	BEER'S BETTER ON A BOAT (Independent)	Clay Hollis & Jesse Raub, Jr.	1505	22	12	14	18	HER WAY AIN'T THE HIGHWAY (Independent)	Jake Bush	1066	64
3	4	25	ROPE THE WIND (Rockin R)	Amanda Kate Ferris	1427	99	13	17	9	LUBBOCK (Independent)	Flatland Cavalry	1061	111
4	5	16	GET AWAY WITH ANYTHING (Independent)	Mike Ryan	1389	69	14	15	23	THIS COULD BE LOVE (Independent)	Kaitlyn Kohler feat. Jamie Richards	1048	60
5	7	19	HILL COUNTRY HOME (Independent)	Kyle Park	1331	129	15	18	10	BORDERLINE CRAZY (Independent)	William Beckmann	1043	138
6	6	26	RIDE OR DIE (Independent)	James Robert Webb	1322	16	16	16	13	GOOD AGAIN, AMEN (Independent)	Keller Cox	1014	33
7	9	15	MORE AFRAID OF LIVING (Independent)	David Adam Byrnes	1305	133	17	13	17	STAINED YOUR CROWN (Independent)	Bart Crow Band	1010	5
8	8	19	ONE MORE FOR THE RIDE (Independent)	Ryder Grimes	1249	53	18	20	22	CALM AFTER THE STORM (Independent)	Britt Hoffman w/ Jerrod Medulla	876	37
9	10	8	BUY THE WORLD A ROUND (Independent)	Aaron Watson	1232	87	19	23	13	AUSTIN ANYMORE (Independent)	Brandi Behlen	770	30
10	11	13	ARE YOU WITH ME (Independent)	Case Hardin	1214	128	20	27	12	SAME OL' COWBOY, DIFFERENT RODEO (Smith)	Josh Ward	738	50

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

billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
1	2	14	LOVE SOMEBODY Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	★★ No. 1 (1 Week) ★★ Morgan Wallen	33.804	+2.683	8853	764	1
2	1	28	HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	30.927	-0.511	7487	-223	2
3	3	55	BOYS BACK HOME PIA/Curb/Columbia Nashville	Dylan Marlowe & Dylan Scott	24.804	-4.129	6362	-1122	3
4	8	11	LIAR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	★★ Most Increased Audience ★★ Jelly Roll	23.403	+3.600	6325	800	5
5	7	27	I AIN'T SAYIN' MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	21.966	+1.479	6346	327	4
6	5	39	A BAR SONG (TIPSY) American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	21.252	-0.152	5252	-99	9
7	10	21	4X4XU Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	21.094	+2.184	6076	584	6
8	9	27	GUY FORTHAT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Luke Combs	20.030	+0.890	5632	182	7
9	4	51	BIGGER HOUSES Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Dan + Shay	19.198	-7.678	5560	-2220	8
10	11	45	DAMN GOOD DAY TO LEAVE Nashville Harbor	Riley Green	16.304	+1.725	4978	602	10
11	14	46	THIS TOWN'S BEEN TOO GOOD TO US Curb	Dylan Scott	15.646	+1.595	4316	305	13
12	13	17	I'M GONNA LOVE YOU CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/Capitol Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson & Carrie Underwood	15.498	+1.313	4522	399	11
13	12	49	THINK I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU Sound/Mercury Nashville	Chris Stapleton	14.752	+0.272	4353	115	12
14	15	10	TEXAS Ten Point/Wheelhouse	Blake Shelton	14.551	+1.007	3995	198	15
15	16	34	HOMETOWN HOME BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	14.150	+0.756	4081	294	14
16	18	40	FRIENDS LIKE THAT Night Train/Broken Bow	John Morgan Featuring Jason Aldean	13.666	+1.053	3954	205	16
17	17	41	FOREVER TO ME Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cole Swindell	13.527	+0.555	3720	111	17
18	19	15	I NEVER LIE Leo33	Zach Top	13.286	+1.578	3607	464	18
19	20	23	AM I OKAY? Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	★★ Airpower ★★ Megan Moroney	9.775	+0.857	2914	334	20
20	22	12	TOUGH PEOPLE Patoka Sounds/Lyric Ridge/Stoney Creek	Drew Baldridge	9.505	+1.584	2816	290	21
21	21	32	HOLY SMOKES Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Bailey Zimmerman	9.297	+0.891	2981	241	19
22	23	28	JUST TO SAY WE DID Blue Chair/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Kenny Chesney	8.351	+0.924	2784	276	22
23	24	30	COMING HOME Three Up Three Down/Columbia Nashville	Old Dominion	7.243	+0.322	2453	126	23
24	25	26	WHISKEY DRINK Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	6.723	+0.022	2292	-29	24
25	26	12	BACKSEAT DRIVER Zone 4/RCA Nashville	Kane Brown	6.041	+0.770	1962	246	26
26	27	31	COWBOYS CRYTOO Black River	Kelsea Ballerini & Noah Kahan	5.231	+0.280	2009	45	25
27	30	26	TRUCK ON FIRE Big Machine	Carly Pearce	4.324	+0.030	1731	-15	30
28	29	43	LIFE WITH YOU Curb	Kelsey Hart	4.321	-0.123	1933	51	27
29	28	46	WHATCHA SEE IS WHATCHA GET Nashville Harbor	Chris Janson	4.317	-0.302	1805	-23	29
30	31	43	SINGLE AGAIN The Core/Universal Music Canada/Mercury Nashville	Josh Ross	4.068	+0.067	1828	109	28

COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART LEGEND

RANKINGS

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

TIES

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

BULLETS

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

RECURRENTS

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

HOT SHOT DEBUT

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

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE

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

AIRPOWER

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

BREAKER

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

billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
31	41	4	WEREN'T FOR THE WIND SAWGOD/Columbia/Triple Tigers	Ella Langley	4.026	+1.602	1246	459	35
32	32	20	PARK Hubbard House/EMI Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	3.732	+0.002	1299	-7	34
33	33	33	FALL OF SUMMER Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery	3.647	+0.206	1593	21	31
34	34	23	COUNTRY HOUSE MCA Nashville	Sam Hunt	3.521	+0.187	1382	16	32
35	37	4	SMILE Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	3.476	+0.667	996	188	41
36	35	18	HEAVENS TO BETSY Big Machine	Jackson Dean	3.416	+0.149	1375	102	33
37	36	20	FRIDAY NIGHT HEARTBREAKER Capitol Nashville	Jon Pardi	3.297	+0.200	1232	16	36
38	38	11	FIX WHAT YOU DIDN'T BREAK RCA Nashville	Nate Smith	3.135	+0.586	1104	204	38
39	40	19	WHAT KINDA MAN MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	2.883	+0.411	1033	92	40
40	47	2	STRAIGHT LINE Hit Red/Capitol Nashville	Keith Urban	2.600	+1.102	521	275	53
41	39	33	EVERYTHING I NEED 19/Wheelhouse	Chayce Beckham	2.534	+0.054	1169	23	37
42	42	10	COUNTRY SONG CAME ON Capitol Nashville	Luke Bryan	2.451	+0.179	1033	103	39
43	45	31	THIS HEART Combustion Masters/RCA Nashville	Corey Kent	2.411	+0.413	797	44	43
44	43	21	BONES Triple Tigers	Russell Dickerson	2.211	+0.029	949	1	42
45	44	13	RELAPSE 717/Warner/WEA	Warren Zeiders	2.013	-0.010	761	4	48
46	48	10	WOULD IF I COULD Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	ERNEST	1.573	+0.093	762	44	47
47	50	24	OVER WHEN WE'RE SOBER Valory	Brantley Gilbert Featuring Ashley Cooke	1.564	+0.303	782	63	45
48	46	17	TRUCK STILL WORKS Loaded Goat/EMI Nashville	Brad Paisley	1.564	-0.210	671	-59	50
49	49	8	HIGHWAY American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	1.330	-0.088	696	-69	49
50	52	10	BETTER THAN YOU Quartz Hill/Stone Country	Joe Nichols / Annie Bosko	1.327	+0.093	787	51	44
51	53	8	DARLIN' Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	1.266	+0.143	549	16	52
52	54	7	WORST WAY Nashville Harbor	Riley Green	1.238	+0.130	215	27	-
53	55	7	GOLDEN CHILD Riser House	Meghan Patrick	1.137	+0.112	769	38	46
54	51	26	DEVIL YOU KNOW Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Tyler Braden	1.121	-0.128	415	-20	57
55	56	5	TIME'S TICKING Valory ★★ Breaker ★★	Justin Moore	1.063	+0.108	490	23	55
56	60	3	COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	1.025	+0.400	419	208	56
57	57	2	10-90 Stancaster/Thirty Tigers/Big Machine	Muscadine Bloodline	1.001	+0.101	252	66	-
58	58	9	I COULD BETHAT RAIN Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Randall King	0.828	+0.032	564	38	51
59	59	3	WOLVES CRY Average Joes	Bryan Martin	0.743	+0.069	491	-15	54
60	NEW		HUNG UP ON YOU Republic Nashville/Mercury Nashville ★★ Hot Shot Debut ★★	Bryce Leatherwood	0.553	+0.057	410	2	58



Chris Janson received an RIAA plaque for quintuple-platinum single "Buy Me a Boat" on Jan. 20 during a Musicians On Call benefit at the RIAA's Washington, D.C., office. From left: RIAA chairman/CEO Mitch Glazier, Janson, RIAA chief policy officer Morna Willens and Musicians On Call president/CEO Pete Griffin.



MCA Nashville artist Vincent Mason stopped at WWKA Orlando, Fla., on Jan. 17 in a radio promotion visit. From left: Universal Music Group Nashville vp of promotion and strategy David Friedman, WWKA music director Melissa Quinones, Mason, Cox Music Group/Orlando director of operations Steve Stewart and MCA Nashville director of Southeast promotion Shannon Hogan.

DAN SWARTZ

billboard



2025

TOP MUSIC VENUES

Billboard's Top Music Venues list will highlight the top concert venues in multiple geographical or qualitative categories across the United States and international markets, selected by the editors based on Billboard Boxscore data and reporting.

This exclusive list will be featured in the Feb. 8 issue of *Billboard*.

Place your brand in front of booking agents, artists, managers, concert promoters, producers, venue operators, label heads and touring executives who are driving the live-music business worldwide.

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ISSUE DATE 2/8 | AD CLOSE 1/28 | MATERIALS DUE 1/30

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

Indie artist **Dee White** (left) previewed his sophomore album, *Heart Talkin'*, for Nashville media on Jan. 22 at Sound Stage. With him are producer **Tony Brown** (George Strait, Reba McEntire) and event moderator **Leslie Fram**.

GORLEY TO JOIN SONGWRITERS HALL

Prolific Nashville composer **Ashley Gorley** ("World on Fire," "You Should Probably Leave") was named Jan. 22 as a 2025 inductee in the Songwriters Hall of Fame, set to enter the New York-based shrine in a class that includes **The Doobie Brothers**, **George Clinton** and **The Beach Boys' Mike Love**.

In the process, Gorley becomes the rare country-based writer who earns a ticket to the Songwriters Hall prior to induction in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. Others with that distinction include **Garth Brooks**, who joined the Songwriters Hall in June 2011, five months before his NSHOF entry; **Toby Keith**, whose 2015 Songwriters Hall membership predated his NSHOF recognition by six years; and **Liz Rose**, a 2023 Songwriters Hall inductee who joined the NSHOF last November.

Gorley, who in a statement said he was "honestly shocked," earned his first hit as a songwriter in 2006 with **Carrie Underwood's** "Don't Forget to Remember Me." He has subsequently accumulated more than 90 country hits, including "I Had Some Help," "Dirt on My Boots," "American Saturday Night" and "You're Gonna Miss This." He has won ASCAP's country songwriter of the year honor 11 times.

In 2011, he established Tape Room Music, a publishing company with more than a dozen staff writers, including **Hunter Phelps** ("wait in the truck"), **Taylor Phillips** ("Hurricane"), **Will Weatherly** ("Thinking 'Bout You") and **Ben Johnson** ("One of Them Girls").

"I started out in the tape room listening to some of the greatest songwriters turn in demos," Gorley said. "Being welcomed into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and this legendary group of music makers is a dream come true. I've always looked up to this organization, and I'm proud to join representing Nashville and the country music community."

Gorley has become a strong advocate for mental health awareness, donating royalties from "I Am Not Okay" to The Onsite Foundation's Creatives Support Network.

The Songwriters Hall induction ceremony will take place June 12 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York.

RADIO & RECORDS®

Big Machine Label Group hired **Tim Reynolds** as vp of digital marketing. He segues from TikTok, where he closed a three-year run as A&R lead for the company's SoundOn North America distribution service. Reach Reynolds [here](#) ... Valory signed Austin-based **Braedon Barnhill** to a recording deal ... **Paul Farnham Jr.** returned to Cumulus/Shreveport-Bossier City, La., as vp/market manager 11 years after he left to serve as Townsquare/Lafayette, La., general sales manager. Cumulus holdings include country **KRMD-FM**. The Townsquare cluster houses country **KMDL-FM** ... Reno Media Group promoted **Bill Schulz** to vp of programming from operations manager, RadioInk.com reported. The chain maintains nine signals in the Reno-Carson City, Nev., community, including country **KOLC** ... **Christopher "Boomer" Layfield** took over as VOX AM/FM/Burlington, Vt., operations manager, according to RadioInsight.com. The position includes PD duties for country **WCPV** Essex, N.Y. Layfield served most recently as Cumulus/Indianapolis operations manager, where he was also country **WFMS** PD ... **Cole Swindell** was added to the lineup for the

iHeartCountry Festival on May 3 at the Moody Center in Austin ... Country Radio Broadcasters announced the recipients of its annual humanitarian awards, to be presented during Country Radio Seminar Feb. 19-21 in Nashville. **KSCS** Dallas morning host **Mark "Hawkeye" Louis** will receive the Tom Rivers Humanitarian Award, while **Eric Church** and **Luke Combs** will share the 2025 artist humanitarian honors ... Krantz Media Group founder and CEO **Gary Krantz**, 65, died Jan. 21, RadioInsight.com reported. Krantz was a network radio veteran, beginning at MJI Broadcasting at its founding in 1981, rising to vp/GM. He established Krantz Media in 2010, with a role as Podcast Radio US managing partner among his duties.

'ROUND THE ROW

Nashville's 615 Leverage + Strategy relaunched as Results Global with its existing partners, chief marketing officer **John Zarling** and COO **Jackie Campbell**, remaining atop the organization's structure. The team, which counts **Dolly Parton** as its largest client, also includes brands account director **Alissa Endres**, manager of talent projects and music marketing **Dawson Simmons**, account coordinator **Aden Henke**, creative director **Frashier Baudry** and media planner and strategist **Lauren Miskella**. Results Global is also seeking digital marketing and paid media specialists. To inquire, email the company [here](#) ... Business management firm O'Neil Hagaman added principal **Rick Myers**. He spent the last three years as Big Machine Label Group senior vp of finance and IT ... Veteran publicist **Collin Citron** joined Los Angeles-based 2b Entertainment, where the client list has included the likes of **Shania Twain**, **Kimberly Perry** and **Sam Williams**. Citron was previously Elektra senior director of publicity ... One Country hired director of social media **Haley Dollarhide**, who formerly owned a social media firm. Reach her [here](#) ... Warner Chappell Nashville and Madfun Entertainment signed a publishing deal with writer-producer **Sam Ellis** ("More Hearts Than Mine," "What If I Never Get Over You") ... Writer-producer **Jacob Durrett** ("Big, Big Plans," "Rockstar") secured a publishing agreement with Big Loud Publishing and ERN's Cadillac Music ... The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum recognized four associates with the Dick Kottler volunteer award, acknowledging 10 years and 1,200 hours of service: **Julie Bayhi**, **Joe Haase**, **Larry Johnson** and **Lindsey Read**. The event included a performance by songwriter **Tom Douglas** ("The House That Built Me") ... **Marty Stuart's** Congress of Country Music in Philadelphia, Miss., plans to hold its first music festival later this year, with proceeds helping complete the building. Dates have not yet been announced ... Susan G. Komen will host Band As One Nashville Concert for the Cure: Trisha Yearwood & Friends on March 26 at the Ryman Auditorium. The lineup includes **Terri Clark**, **Sheryl Crow**, **Lauren Alaina**, **Lainey Wilson**, **Amy Grant**, **Keith Urban**, **Anita Cochran** and **Kristin Chenoweth**. Receipts will assist breast cancer patients ... The Nashville Songwriters Association International awarded its Todd Givens Memorial Scholarship to writer-artist **Brittany Moore** ... The Country Music Association invested \$100,000 apiece in six music industry mental health organizations: Amber Health, Backline, ECCHO Live, Music Health Alliance, MusiCares and Porter's Call. ●



Songwriter of the year finalist **Jessie Jo Dillon** ("Lies Lies Lies," "Am I Okay?") was among the attendees when the Recording Academy's Nashville Chapter hosted its annual Grammy Nominee Celebration on Jan. 21 at the Loews Vanderbilt Hotel. From left: Nashville Chapter president **Armand Hutton**, Dillon, Nashville Chapter executive director **Alicia Warwick** and Big Machine Music president **Mike Molinar**.

billboard



SPOTLIGHT: SPAIN

In the March 8 issue, *Billboard* will celebrate the explosion of *música latina* in Spain, where music in Spanish from around the world is finding new and fertile ground for touring, airplay and cross-pollination. We will look at Spain's booming music scene and how labels, promoters and artists are increasingly working together across international borders to further promote music in Spanish.

Advertise in this issue to position your business in front of key decision-makers who are driving Spain's music industry.

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ISSUE DATE 3/8 | AD CLOSE 2/24 | MATERIALS DUE 2/26

billboard Country Airplay Index

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

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4X4XU Sony Country, BMI/Story Farmer, BMI/Reservoir 416, BMI/Songs Of One Riot Music, BMI/ONE TOOTH PRODUCTIONS, BMI/Super LCS Publishing, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI (L.Wilson, J.Decious, A.Raitiere) **7**

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WOMEN IN MUSIC

On March 22, *Billboard* will publish its highly anticipated Women in Music special issue, featuring top women in the music business who are creating excitement and making their mark across labels and in publishing and touring.

Coinciding with this issue will be the Women in Music awards ceremony on March 29. The event will bring together music's most prominent women artists and the industry's top women business executives to recognize and celebrate their achievements.

Take this opportunity to congratulate the most powerful and talented women in music and wish them continued success.

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C
O

30 Years Ago

Alan Jackson Went 'Country,' And To No. 1

In 1995, Jackson banked his ninth of 26 Hot Country Songs chart-toppers with his buzzy single

On Jan. 28, 1995, **Alan Jackson's** "Gone Country" hit No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart.

The track was authored by **Bob McDill** and produced by **Keith Stegall**. In 2017, *Billboard* described the song as, lyrically, "reflective of a time period where many artists were coming to Music City from New York, Los Angeles and all points in between."

"Gone Country" marked Jackson's ninth of 26 Hot Country Songs No. 1s. Dating to his first, "I'd Love You All Over Again," in March 1991, he and **Tim McGraw** boast the most leaders: 26 each.

Jackson was born Oct. 17, 1958, in Newnan, Ga., and moved to Nashville in 1985. He became the first artist signed to Arista Records' then-new country division in

June 1989. In 1990, he logged his first of 51 top 10 singles, the No. 3-peaking "Here in the Real World."

In 1979, Jackson married his high school sweetheart, **Denise Jackson** (yep, same last name). The couple has been married for 45 years and has three daughters. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2017.

—JIM ASKER

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REWINDING
THE
COUNTRY
CHARTS

Jackson at the 16th annual Cable ACE Awards in Los Angeles in 1995.



TH	W	LA	W	2 W	WK	PRO	DU	LA
		W	AG	AG	CH	DU	CE	BL
1	4	5	23	***No. 1*** 1 week at No. 1		GONE COUNTRY K. STEGALL (B. MCDILL) ALAN JACKSON ARISTA ALBUM CUT		
2	6	8	11	◆ PAM TILLIS (V) ARISTA 1.2759		MI VIDA LOCA (MY CRAZY LIFE) P. TILLIS, S. FISHELL (P. TILLIS, J. LEARY)		
3	3	4	13	◆ REBA MCENTIRE (C) (V) MCA 54888		TILL YOU LOVE ME T. BROWN, R. MCENTIRE (B. DIPIERO, G. BURR)		
4	2	2	14	MARK CHESNUTT (C) (V) DECCA 54941		GOIN' THROUGH THE BIG D M. WRIGHT (R. ROGERS, J. WRIGHT, M. WRIGHT)		
5	1	1	14	◆ TIM MCGRAW CURB ALBUM CUT		NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON J. STROUD, B. GALLIMORE (W. PERRY, J. BARNHILL)		
6	9	9	13	BROOKS & DUNN		I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MY HEART		

RON GALELLA/RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES

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2025

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This feature will also include a round-up of top law schools attended by the notable alumni on the premier Music Lawyers list.

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