

A PUBLICATION OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

# CLOSE UP

*Magazine*

DECEMBER 2023

**JELLY ROLL**

*Talks Redemption*

*In this issue:*

**LUKE COMBS: BEHIND  
THE MAKING OF AN  
INTERNATIONAL CAREER**

**STEPS TO  
FINANCIAL SECURITY**

**CELEBRATING  
THE CMA AWARDS**

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Cover Photo: Josh Brasted/CMA

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# HELLO, MEMBERS!



Dear CMA Member,

It has been a busy few months, and we are thrilled to be bringing another issue of *CMA Close Up Magazine* to our membership base! Since we last had an issue hit your mailbox, we have honored excellence in the genre through the Country Music Hall of Fame and CMA Awards, highlighted the incredible CMA Foundation Music Teachers of Excellence, welcomed artists back to CMA HQ for special Live @ CMA performances and continued to host monthly MemberSIPS events, all while seeing unparalleled growth and consumption of Country Music all over the world. We definitely have a few things to celebrate as we approach the end of 2023.

In this issue, you can read about all of these events, initiatives and milestones, relive "The 57<sup>th</sup> Annual CMA Awards," hear from one of our Music Teachers of Excellence, take a closer look at the legacy of Country Music Hall of Fame inductees, Tanya Tucker and Patty Loveless, connect with fellow CMA members, and gain a variety of professional development tools and resources along the way.

It is an honor to serve as your CMA Board President, and I look forward to assuming the Chairman position in 2024. Because of professionals like you, our industry continues to thrive. Thank you for your continued support and engagement.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kella Farris". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Kella Farris**  
Incoming Chairman, CMA Board of Directors





# STEPS TO FINANCIAL SECURITY

By Jamie Cheek and Ted Klontz, Ph.D.

*Jamie Cheek is an owner and vice president at FBMM, responsible for overseeing firm development and helping to set the vision for the company's continued growth and excellence. With more than two decades of experience, Cheek is both a trusted adviser and financial manager to top recording artists and one of the most highly regarded business managers in the industry. He also serves on CMA's Board of Directors.*

*Ted Klontz, Ph.D., is an associate professor of practice and financial psychology at Creighton University, the director of the Financial Psychology Institute®, a professional consultant for major entertainment management groups, an international speaker, a published researcher and author who has contributed to six books, and a workshop developer and leader.*

Financial security is different for everyone, and how to achieve it often requires help because as humans, we are not naturally wired to make it happen. For thousands of years, we didn't have to worry about it. Now we do. Let's take a look at ways to make financial security work for you.

## Save as you earn for federal and state taxes

For W2 employees, this is automatic, but confirm by asking a tax professional.

For 1099 or independent contractors, you can determine an amount to set aside each month based on your income received and expenses paid. If

your earnings are consistent year to year, you can set a fixed amount based on prior year's taxes. You are required to pay quarterly to the IRS and most states, if applicable. To better understand this cost, see the infographic on the next page. [J&T](#)

## Take advantage of tax-friendly investments

The key to any investment is to start early.

For retirement, start an IRA for yourself or participate in your company's 401k plan if available.



Talk with an investment professional about both. Warren Buffett calls the compounding interest effect "the 8th wonder of the world." See the infographic below to illustrate the power of starting early.

*\*If saving for your child's college tuition is a goal, use a 529 plan.*

### Spend less than you earn

The best way to do this is to make and keep track of a personal spending plan.

### Limit debt

Limit carrying credit card debt from month to month, taking on car loans for a car you cannot afford, or buying things you simply can't afford. Some debt can be good, for example, a mortgage, but consider:

- a) Putting down at least 20%.
- b) Ensure that your expected income can meet mortgage payments within your personal spending plan.
- c) Related to a) and b), if you are not "there yet," don't assume that renting is "throwing money away." If you're borrowing money to buy a house, you'll need to account for interest costs, property taxes, maintenance and more. If those totals are significantly higher than your rent, it may be beneficial to wait on the purchase of a house.

### Establish a rainy-day fund

It should represent at least six months of your total monthly expenses.

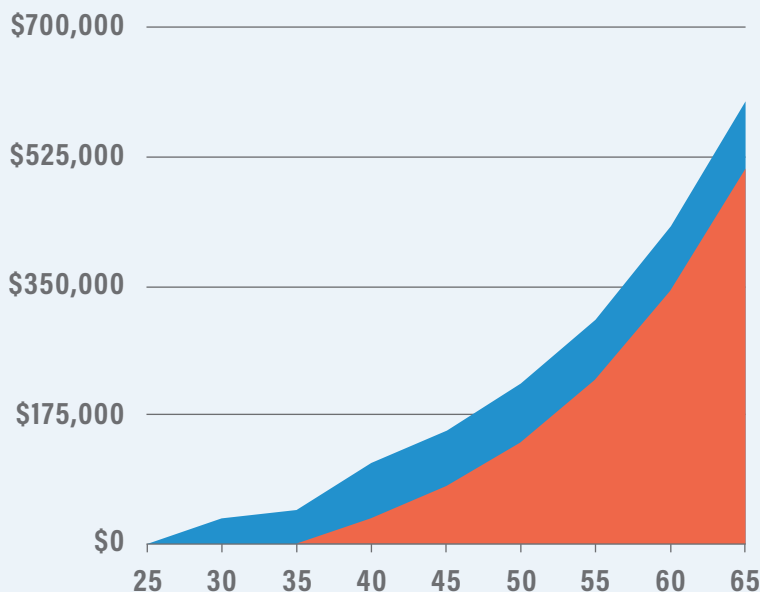
### Establish a savings goal

This might look different for everyone, depending on your stage of life and ultimate goals. There can be mid-term goals such as saving for a down payment for a house, or long-term goals such as saving for the day you no longer have to work. As an example, if one's target is living at \$100,000 per year, a conservative estimate on a savings amount that could pay those expenses each year without losing principle (its core value), is about \$2,500,000. An average annual rate of return of 4% would be a reasonable expectation from a balanced portfolio run by a qualified financial advisor. That rate of return would equate to \$100,000 per year.

If you struggle with saving, create a well-imagined dream that you keep in mind, which is one of the ways to bypass the brain's inclination to not do the right thing. Put a picture of it as your screensaver to remind you of the reason you are saving.

*Regularly review and adjust your investment plan as needed. Remember, investing involves risks and it's important to do your own research ([www.investor.gov](http://www.investor.gov) is a good resource) and seek professional advice before making any investment decisions.*

# THE POWER OF INVESTING EARLY



#### Investor A:

Saves \$5,000/year from age 25–35 then stops funding

#### Investor B:

Saves \$5,000/year from age 36–65

*\*Chart uses 7% annual rate of return*

# A CONVERSATION WITH JENNIE SMYTHE

## INDUSTRY VETERAN TALKS CMA MEMBERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

By Jeremy Chua

Over the course of the last year, since restructuring the foundation of its membership, CMA has placed a strategic emphasis on pipeline opportunities created through a variety of events and initiatives.

Jennie Smythe, a CMA member since 2009, continues to utilize these pipeline resources and opportunities both personally and professionally. As CEO and founder of Girlilla Marketing, Smythe recently celebrated the 15th anniversary of her company's launch.



Photo: Courtesy of Jennie Smythe

Arriving in Nashville in 2007, Smythe wasted no time putting the pedal to the metal to network her way across Music Row — something she continues doing today.

"When I first joined CMA as a member, I took advantage of some of the perks that being a part of a trade association offered. I remember using the member directory often, and reaching out to the CMA team to ask about seminars and other opportunities that I could not only learn from but that also allowed me to make connections with fellow members. Those were huge tools to use as an entrepreneur, especially as someone who was new to Nashville and the Country Music industry," Smythe tells *CMA Close Up*.

"I had the opportunity to meet people [at CMA] who became friends, people involved in the same work I was doing. CMA became like a community for me," she continues. "Being a part of CMA and the CMA Foundation has allowed me to grow both

professionally and personally, truly because of the unique knowledge I've received and the people I've been fortunate to be exposed to."

As 2023 CMA Board President-Elect, Smythe served as the CMA Foundation Chairperson in both 2019 and 2022 and was previously involved in the Women's Leadership Academy. Her long-tenured involvement with CMA has provided her with a fresh, in-depth understanding of the vast work the organization does.

"Early in my career, I thought I understood what CMA did in terms of producing an award show, managing a philanthropic foundation, and supporting the Country community around town by honoring touring personnel, songwriters and more. But I was amazed to learn so much more when I became a Board member," Smythe says. "My first year serving on the Board, I was so overwhelmed with the amount of talent that was in the room. I just couldn't believe it. I was just honored to even be in the room. And the relatively small CMA staff is just incredible. I feel so grateful having had a front row seat watching them execute all that they do, on behalf of all of us in the industry."

Smythe is proud of the team that she leads at Girlilla Marketing. Part of her hiring process has involved reaching out to CMA for talent recommendations from their group of CMA EDU members and alumni, and beyond.

***"My first year serving on the Board, I was so overwhelmed with the amount of talent that was in the room. I just couldn't believe it."***

***-Jennie Smythe***

"There's something really comforting for me when I call CMA to ask about hiring recommendations and they say, 'Yes! We have this person that's part of the CMA EDU program and he or she will be amazing at Girlilla. Can we set up an interview?'" shares Smythe. "I know unequivocally the graduates that come out of the CMA EDU program are going to have the skills they need to be an effective employee from day one."

Smythe believes CMA EDU, Women's Leadership Academy and other CMA initiatives do an excellent job of preparing members for careers in the music business.

"The thing about CMA EDU is that all of the activities students participate in are things you can't learn from sitting in a classroom. The same is true with the Women's Leadership Academy," Smythe explains. "Both programs give its participants the real-life tools needed to have a successful career in the music industry. I cannot overstate how much trust I have knowing that somebody has made it through various CMA programs. Knowing that these professionals have an extra layer of coaching that has built-in critical skills is such a blessing to our business."

Smythe is a big believer in giving back and mentoring the next generation of music industry professionals, and she encourages her staff to adopt this ethos as well.

"Any time [the CMA EDU team] asks us if we want to participate in a program or panel, Lindsey [Feinstein] and Kate [Cacopardo] are always excited to help. Even though everybody's busy with their own work, when you take the time to mentor, it really reminds you of why you wanted to be in this business," shares Smythe. "Reconnecting with that mentality is an important reminder of just how lucky you are to be in the spot you're in."

Boasting a longtime involvement with CMA, Smythe encourages fellow CMA members and employers to fully tap into the pipeline efforts offered by the organization, especially with the expansion of its membership structure to include students, all-genre industry members and Country Music industry professionals.

"Networking with communities like CMA EDU and CMA as a trade organization, especially now with its expanded membership tiers that include students and young professionals, really make this *the* place to connect if you want to be in the business or if you already are in the business."

**Learn more about all of CMA's programs, events and initiatives**





# FIND YOUR *Community* @ CMA<sup>®</sup>

## *Build Your Skills*

- ✓ Industry education
- ✓ Research and business insights
- ✓ Professional development



Photo: Becca Risley/CMA



Photo: Becca Risley/CMA

## *Make Connections*

- ✓ Members-only events
- ✓ Group think-tanks
- ✓ Women in music groups
- ✓ Intentional connection opportunities

## *Unlock Resources*

- ✓ Mental health resources
- ✓ Health insurance options
- ✓ Discounts and deals
- ✓ Industry database
- ✓ On-demand videos



Photo: Becca Risley/CMA

# CMA® CLOSE UP

## Upcoming Events

### January 17: Annual Meeting of the Members

Join us for our Annual Meeting of the Members hosted at CMA HQ in Nashville. We are excited to collaborate and foster connections with our members.

### January 23: MemberSIPS

Our monthly MemberSIPS events bring together a curated group of members to discuss a particular topic over a "sip" of some kind! Come enjoy a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or a mocktail over meaningful conversation with the CMA Community. The curated group will receive an invitation via email.

### January 25 - 28: CMA at NAMM

Members of the CMA Staff will be attending and engaging with NAMM in Anaheim! If you'll be out there too, let us know. Looking forward to seeing you all in California!

### February: MemberSIPS

Our monthly MemberSIPS events bring together a curated group of members to discuss a particular topic over a "sip" of some kind! Come enjoy a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or a mocktail over meaningful conversation with the CMA Community. The curated group will receive an invitation via email.

### February 12: CMA Touring Awards

Help us celebrate the Country Music touring industry and the amazing people who continue to promote and sustain America's favorite live entertainment format.

### March 1: 2024 Women's Leadership Academy Application Opens

Apply to be a part of the 2024 class of Women's Leadership Academy. In its third year, WLA is an interactive coaching experience for high-performing, high-potential women leaders in the Country Music industry.

### March 2-3: Country to Country (C2C) Rotterdam and Berlin

Europe's biggest Country festival, Country to Country (C2C), will take place in the Netherlands and Germany on March 2-3 featuring the biggest Country stars on the main stage and the hottest newcomers on the side stages. The *Introducing Nashville* lineup will open C2C Rotterdam at the RTM Stage on March 2, and will perform at C2C Berlin on March 3.



Megan Moroney performs acoustic versions of some of her hit songs to CMA staff, CMA members, CMA EDU students and others during her visit to CMA HQ in Nashville on Tuesday, Sept. 5. Photo: Acacia Evans/CMA

### March 8-10: Country to Country (C2C) United Kingdom

C2C U.K. will take place March 8-10 in London (The O2), Glasgow (Ovo Hydro) and Belfast (SSE Arena). Serving as the official kickoff leading into C2C, the CMA Songwriters Series show is back once again on March 7, while the *Introducing Nashville* lineup will serve as the festival's opening set.

### March 14-17: CMC Rocks

CMC Rocks is the premier Country Music festival in Australia, uniting fans with the heart and soul of Country Music. This year's headliners include Tyler Hubbard, Lainey Wilson and Chris Young and will take place at the Willowbank Raceway.

### To Be Announced: New Member Orientation

Learn more about what it means to be a CMA member while connecting with other new members and CMA staff. More information to come!



Jelly Roll performs acoustic versions of some of his hit songs to CMA staff, CMA members, CMA EDU students and others during his visit to CMA HQ in Nashville on Wednesday, Aug. 23. Photo: Nick Zimmer/CMA



Hailey Whitters performs acoustic versions of some of her hit songs for CMA staff, CMA members, CMA EDU students and others during her visit to CMA HQ in Nashville on Wednesday, Nov. 15. Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA



# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



Artists, managers and music industry professionals gather for the July MemberSIPS event focused on communicating effectively through media on Monday, July 17 at CMA HQ in Nashville. Photo: Becca Risley/CMA



Country artist Brian Kelley visits music students and teachers at Franklin High School in Franklin, TN on Wednesday, Oct. 18 in partnership with the CMA Foundation and Music Has Value. Photo: Drew Noble/CMA



Students gather alongside Country artist Frank Ray during a visit to CMA HQ in Nashville on Wednesday, Oct. 11 as part of a partnership between CMA and Conexión Américas. Photo: Emily April Allen/CMA



CMA members gather for a MemberSIPS event focused on the growth of Country and Latin Music on Tuesday, Oct. 17 at CMA HQ in Nashville. Photo: Becca Risley/CMA



Tiera Kennedy visits music students and teachers at Tullahoma East Middle School in Tullahoma, TN on Monday, Sept. 25 in partnership with the CMA Foundation and Music Has Value. Photo: Pamela Hothorn/CMA





Photo: John Russell/CMA

# PATTY LOVELESS

**EFFORTLESSLY AUTHENTIC AND NEW COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME MEMBER**

*As Told to CMA Close Up by Vince Gill*

*Patty Loveless was voted as one of three members of the 2023 class of Country Music Hall of Fame inductees along with Bob McDill and Tanya Tucker. Loveless was inducted in the Modern Era Artist category at the Medallion Ceremony in the CMA Theater at the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum on October 22, 2023.*



The first time I met Patty was in 1985 when she was in my signing line at Fan Fair. She told me she liked my singing. She said, 'Hi, I'm Patty. I love what you do and we're going to sing together some day.' I thought, 'Yeah, sure we are' and lo and behold a year or two later I wound up in the studio singing on her first record and a whole bunch of records after that. It was when we were in the studio that she told me that story.

It's an amazing gift of a voice she has, and it just so happened to blend in a pretty magical way with mine. Now, all these years later we've toured together, we've recorded together, we've been through everything together.



## *"Go Rest High On That Mountain"*

The first song we ever recorded together was her first Top 10 hit called "If My Heart Had Windows." It's an old George Jones song. I remember hearing her sing and going, 'Man, this is right up my alley. This is the way everybody oughta sing right here.'

Then years later we ended up performing my song, "Go Rest High On That Mountain," at George Jones' funeral, and I fell apart in the middle of it. People

don't really know, and I haven't shared this very often, but that was hard for me, to fall apart in front of the whole world. But nobody knows the reason. The next time you look at that video you'll see that when I lost it is when Patty's voice started singing with me. It had been a while since I heard that voice, and it was the sound of it that took me out and made me lose it. I've sung at too many funerals to let one get to me very often but that one did. It truly was hearing her come in and sing the chorus with me. When that happened, I just fell apart, and I never did get it back. You know, it's hard to watch yourself fall apart, but Patty soldiered on and kept singing and it was a really beautiful moment in time. Two people being pretty torn up about losing easily one of the greatest singers that ever lived.

Patty is undeniable as an artist. You hear her sing and you go, 'Okay, game over.' That's how it's always been. She's one of the most powerful singers I've ever heard and one of the most unique singers I've ever heard. I said it that night at the Country Music Hall of Fame Medallion Ceremony, hers is one of the most authentic voices I've ever heard. Some people sing and they manipulate their voice to do things that it doesn't do naturally, but she doesn't do that. Not even one note. That's why her voice is so special, that's why it's so...authentic. People in other worlds who maybe don't know about Country Music, hear that voice and think, 'Well that's real. That's about as honest as it gets.'

*Vince Gill is a Country Music Hall of Fame member, 18-time CMA Award winner, a CMA member since 1985 and a member of the Grand Ole Opry.*



Vince Gill and Patty Loveless perform "Pocket Full of Gold" at "The 25th Annual CMA Awards" on Oct. 2, 1991, at the Grand Ole Opry House, live telecast on the CBS Television Network. Photo: Beth Gwynn/CMA

# CMA STUDENT MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

# CREED MILLER

**MILLER IS A JOURNALISM STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER WHO HAS RECENTLY JOINED CMA AS A MEMBER IN THE STUDENT TIER**

By Lisa Valentine



Photo: Courtesy of Creed Miller



Photo: Courtesy of Creed Miller



Photo: Courtesy of Creed Miller

Creed Miller, a sophomore at The University of Colorado Boulder, was eager to get involved in the music industry through CMA's new student membership tier when it became available. Currently pursuing a degree in journalism, he knows without a doubt that the music industry is where he wants to be. "I'm looking to do journalism..." says Miller. "I know for sure I want to be working in the music industry."

This past summer while watching the "CMA Fest" television special on Hulu, Miller was inspired to explore CMA's website to learn more and discovered the trade association's student membership tier for which he immediately filled out an application.

"I kind of saw this as a way to help me break into the industry and meet the right people through networking to get jobs and internships I want, as well as help me follow the career path I want to pursue," explains Miller.

He's specifically found the job and internship postings helpful in keeping him up to date on opportunities in Nashville while he's across the country in Colorado.

Though he's still in college, Miller has eagerly been exploring options and envisioning what he'd like his future in the music industry to look like. "I've always loved writing from a super young age, and I feel like I've always been pretty good at it," shares the Broomfield, CO native. "Basically, for as long as I can remember I knew I wanted to do something based around writing. I think it'd be really cool to work at a record label, whether writing or PR. I've grown up loving Country Music and I think it's really shaped who I am today, so I think it'd be cool to stay within that genre."

Miller has his sights set on an internship in Nashville this summer to gain experience and connections within the music business.

He spent this past summer as a remote intern for Country Central, writing single and album reviews for the outlet's social media. "I have absolutely loved it," he says of writing for Country Central. "I've met a lot of really cool people. It's just been fun to work with people that carry such similar interests as me."

While in high school he always thought it'd be fun to pursue a career in music but figured his dream was too "far off" to become a reality. "I think it was more in my head throughout high school. It was always like, 'Oh, that would be really cool,' but I don't think I could necessarily pursue that because it just seemed like way more far off for whatever reason," says Miller. "I don't know why I had that in my head, but I think as my passion grew, I slowly started realizing that maybe I could. Then you start to meet people and it's like, 'Okay, this is something I really want to do. I could make this happen.'"

"I think the best piece of advice I've ever received was from my parents," explains Miller. "They always taught me the importance of maintaining a positive mindset. Once I made that shift it became a true game changer because it keeps not just me, but the people around me happier. It also comes into play when things aren't necessarily going good because my parents would force me to find the positive even in bad situations. Because of that I have ended up being a lot more productive and it has improved every aspect of my life."

With his passion for the genre and his drive to connect with the Country Music industry in Nashville, Miller is excited to be a CMA member and one day have a career in Music City.

"I would encourage other students to apply to be a member because if you're really passionate about this, I think it's something that can do a lot to help you get to where you want to go," says Miller. "I think it is a huge steppingstone to help create opportunities."



# CMA INDUSTRY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

# ALANDIS BRASSEL

**BRASSEL IS AN ENTERTAINMENT LAWYER WHOSE EXTENSIVE WORK TO PROTECT THE MUSIC COMMUNITY LED HIM TO BECOME AN INDUSTRY TIER MEMBER**

By Cillea Houghton

For Alandis Brassel, music has been a part of his life for as long as he can remember. His first memory is when he was 6 years old and started taking piano lessons, soon joining the church choir. "Music has been part of everything that I do," Brassel tells *CMA Close Up*. "Music is always where I found my place."

As he got older, he started learning how to do music production and attended a high school for the arts where he was tasked with writing the theme song for the school's TV show. Along with his musical sense, he also developed business acumen when he was in a band in college and took on the unofficial role of manager, making sure everyone got paid after a gig. The wheels started turning in his senior year of college when he wanted to pursue entertainment law, but Brassel decided to take the more artistic path and accepted a job as a studio assistant for producer and engineer Jimmy Douglas, who shined a light on the situation.

"He said, 'If I could do it over, I would go to law school because lawyers are in the middle of everything. No matter what changes in the music industry, lawyers are always there,'" Brassel recalls of Douglas' advice. "I made a deal with myself, and I said, 'I'm going to work in the industry for five years to learn it and then I'll go to law school after that.' And that's what I ended up doing." Brassel graduated with a master's degree in music business from New York University and then attended Vanderbilt Law School in Nashville, setting his career in entertainment law in motion. He is the founder of Brassel Law, a firm where his job comes down to two words: "protection" and "monetization." He works with clients including songwriters, artists, producers and others to protect and monetize their creative assets, trademark their work and assist music licensing, among other services. His distinct trademark is that he truly listens to his clients - not just to their needs, but to their music. "My clients think I'm joking whenever I say, 'Send me your music, I want to listen to it,'" Brassel expresses about "being an ear" for his clients. "I don't think they expect their lawyer to really listen to music like that. It's really the fun part, it's why I do it. I like to be a part of the processes as an adviser, but I also love just listening to music."

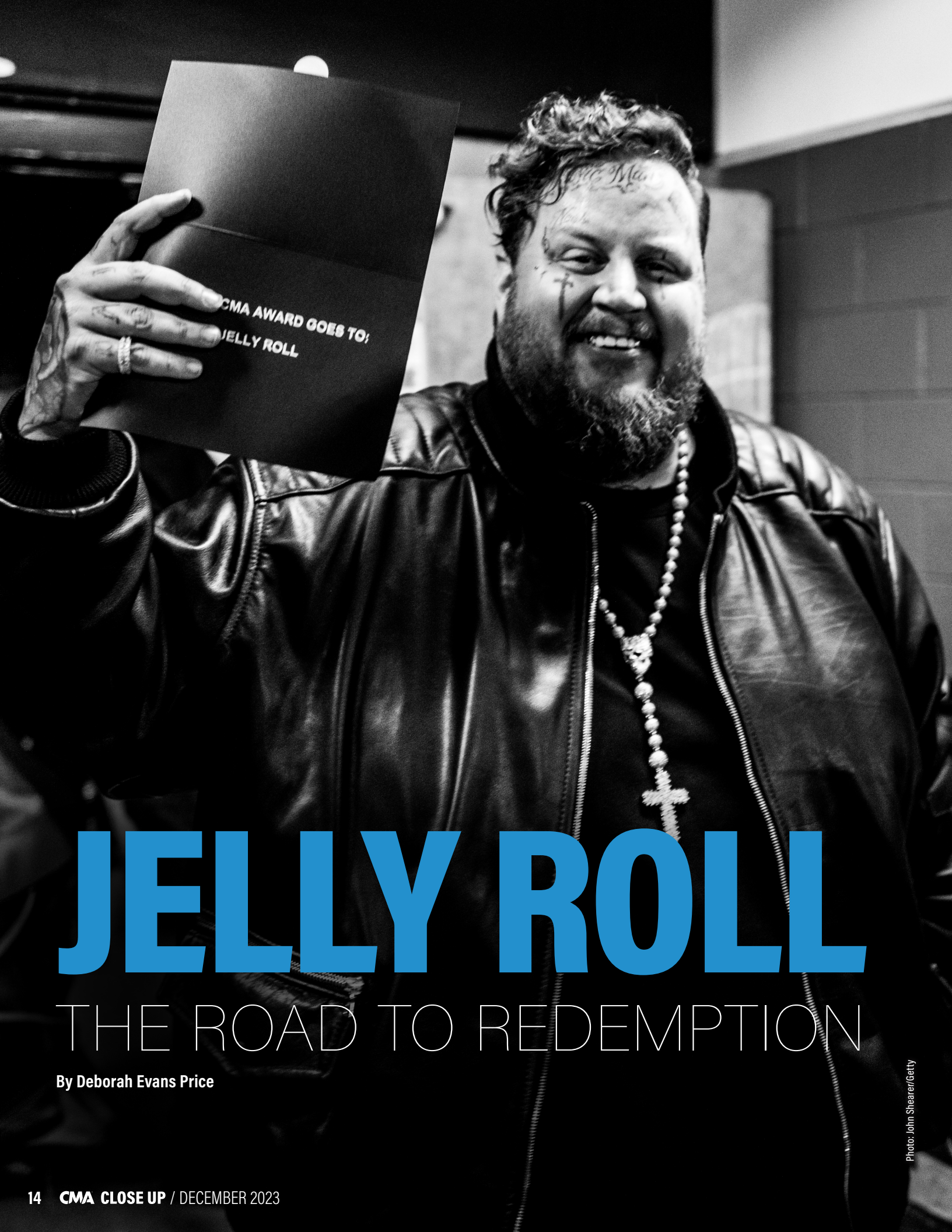
His extensive work in entertainment law led him to become a member of CMA, an opportunity that came when he was the program director of the Arts and Business Council of Greater Nashville, and he hosted a copyright seminar for CMA. Brassel says that being a CMA member has given him inside knowledge of the Nashville music industry he wouldn't have otherwise. "It really has been access. It's being aware of everything that's going on in the industry," Brassel says. "I'm a board member of Nashville Music Equality, so we're really big about creating inroads for minorities of all kinds in Nashville. Being surrounded by Country Music more and being able to meet more people...I think that's been the biggest advantage. Getting to know some of the people behind the scenes and who's who at the different companies, I think that's been very important."

Another critical aspect of Brassel's job is educating his clients to save them from signing a bad deal and helping them to "take control of their careers," going so far as to send his clients books and articles relevant to what service they need. "I see a songwriter or an artist as the CEO of their career," he says. "If you're going to be running a company, you need to know enough to make good decisions. That's why I think education is important. In order to think creatively and critically, you have to have a good understanding of what's happening. Being educated about the industry only makes the industry better."

Brassel has taken his passion for education into his role as a professor of music business at the University of Memphis where he passes on the valuable advice he received from Douglas about sticking to his path. "It's not easy, but if you stick with it, if you do things right, if you do good work, your career will continue to develop," he professes. "I think that not just attorneys, but anybody who's pursuing a career that's really hard to break into, whether it's songwriting or being an artist, I think that really does resonate across media. I'm grateful for the opportunities to work with different artists and that they trust me with this part of their careers. Every opportunity is an accomplishment."







# JELLY ROLL

## THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

By Deborah Evans Price

Photo: John Shearer/Getty



"There's something poetic about a 39-year-old man winning New Artist of the Year. I don't know where you're at in your life or what you're going through, but I want to tell you to keep going, baby. I want to tell you, 'Success is on the other side.' I want to tell you, 'It's going to be okay.' I want to tell you that the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror for a reason, because what's in front of you is so much more important than what's behind you."

When Jelly Roll, with one of the most memorable acceptance speeches in CMA Awards history, concluded his remarks following his CMA New Artist of the Year win, all you could hear inside Bridgestone Arena was the affirming roar of the industry, artists and fans in attendance, all standing in support of the singer.

"The 57th Annual CMA Awards" was the pinnacle of a long climb for Jason DeFord, whose mother nicknamed him Jelly Roll as a child. No stranger to restoration and redemption, he grew up in the South Nashville suburb of Antioch, falling into a life of drug addiction and crime at an early age, which landed him in jail.

## "My spirit changed. The man changed; the music followed."

Music became his ticket to a better life. He began his career blending rap, rock and hip-hop and built a reputation through hard work and relentless self-promotion. "Volume," he responds when asked the key to his early success. "It was putting out lots of music and not being afraid to try. It was being very volume driven and old school—working more, hand to hand, passing out mix tapes, CDs, being early to the internet, early to MySpace, early to YouTube, just kind of always being on the front side of what was happening."

Still, he admits there were times as a rising artist that he lost hope. "The darkest moment for me was when I lost my belief that it was going to work," he says. "I didn't have a plan B. I was in my late 20s and it didn't look like it was going to happen. I felt like I was getting too old and missed my window."

A conversation with his late father turned his life around. His dad was a meat salesman and Jelly Roll asked his help getting a regular job. "He said, 'Son, I've watched you dedicate your whole life to music, to this business and to this dream of yours. If you had put that same time and energy into being a doctor, you'd be at Vanderbilt right now...There's no way you can put that much time and work into something and it not work. I wouldn't give up yet,'" he recalls.

"That conversation changed my whole life. I left there inspired and encouraged. I believed, and I just went for it again."

His career began flourishing. So, when he decided to make the transition to Country Music, it

surprised many. "I started finding my voice, that's how I got into the Country side," he says. "I started falling in love with the instrumentation. My spirit changed. The man changed; the music followed."

Jelly Roll opened "The 57th Annual CMA Awards" dueting with Wynonna Judd on his hit "Need A Favor" and closed the show performing The Judds' "Love Can Build a Bridge" with K. Michelle. It was a landmark evening for a man who admits he had always wanted to be accepted in Country Music circles. "That was a dream of mine. I wanted to play the Grand Ole Opry. I wanted to be on Country radio. These were things that meant a lot to me, and Broken Bow was the only label in Nashville that didn't seem afraid of it."

When his song "Save Me" became a viral hit, labels came calling. "Broken Bow really believed in what I was trying to do. I've always been story driven [delivering] truth, three chords, Country top line lyrics."

Jelly Roll credits BMG Nashville president Jon Loba with supporting his vision. "He really is fearless. He's not playing money ball over there. If he feels something, he goes for it."

## "I didn't feel entitled to anything, so winning something meant a lot to me. It meant more than people will ever know."

Loba's faith has been rewarded as Jelly Roll's Country career exploded. "Son Of A Sinner," from his Ballads of the Broken album, hit No. 1 on Billboard's Country Airplay chart and "Need A Favor," the first single from his 2023 album *Whitsitt Chapel*, also soared to No. 1. "I knew that I would find my people, though I did not expect this to be such a wide stroke," he says. "The fact that everybody in Country Music has been so warm to me has been nothing short of amazing."

On the heels of his CMA New Artist win, Jelly Roll is now a two-time nominee at the 2024 GRAMMYS, where is nominated for Best New Artist as well as



Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



the Country Duo/Group Performance category for "Save Me," alongside Lainey Wilson. Winning CMA New Artist was particularly gratifying. "I didn't think I would win," he told *Close Up* backstage that night. "I didn't feel entitled to anything, so winning something meant a lot to me. It meant more than people will ever know."

Jelly Roll has also been appreciative of the positive response to *Whitsitt Chapel*, a personal album that shares his journey and the importance of his faith. "I've always believed that God will use his most unlikely messenger to give a big message," the now 40-year-old says. "I've been trying to be better at it, but I've cussed like a sailor my whole life. It's funny that I ended up being the guy doing the faith project in town but it's what was on my heart. The older I get, the more I have a heart to be of service. Life in general is a marathon. It's a journey not a destination. That's what I hope people get from it."



Photo: Acacia Evans/CMA



Photo: John Shearer/Getty



Photo: Benjamin Askinas/CMA



# CMA PROFESSIONAL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

# CHIEF ZARUK

## ZARUK IS AN INDUSTRY VETERAN IN MANAGEMENT WHO JOINED CMA AS A PROFESSIONAL MEMBER TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN NASHVILLE

By Cillea Houghton

In the eighth grade, Chief Zaruk won a public speaking contest. His topic of choice was how music influences your lifestyle, particularly the impact of rock stars like KISS, AC/DC and Motley Crue and how he and many of his peers emulated them. Two years later, Zaruk had another music epiphany in the 10th grade when he learned about producing and engineering. "The light bulb went on when I was like, 'I want to do one of those jobs. I want to be a guy that's involved in making music,'" he tells *CMA Close Up*. "It was a calling for me."

After graduating high school, Zaruk enrolled in a two-year program at a recording school in his hometown of Vancouver, Canada, and later got a job at a recording studio where he got to experience the thrill of live music. He had his first major breakthrough in the music industry when a then-unknown Nickelback came into the studio to record their first EP in 1996, *Hesher*, and they asked Zaruk to mix one of their upcoming live shows. Zaruk got the opportunity of a lifetime when Nickelback called him in 2000 after they signed their first record deal and asked him to be their tour manager for their shows in the U.S. "That was my first real big tour managing in front-of-house for a band that was starting to break," he recalls. "You make mistakes on the way because there's no school to become a tour manager or live sound engineer - you have to get out there and learn as you go and figure it out."

In 2005 when Nickelback decided to take a year off, Zaruk was ready to focus on managing full time. That's when he got connected with rock band Hinder, who were Nickelback fans and interested in working with Nickelback's producer, Joey Moi. Zaruk then became Hinder's manager, the band's success prompting labels and industry friends to call Zaruk with management opportunities, his client roster ranging from Jason Newstead of Metallica to Country singer Jessie James Decker.

Zaruk experienced another major career shift when he got a call from Seth England at Big Loud Shirt Publishing in Nashville saying that Country star Jake Owen was a fan of Moi's work. The two then came to Nashville where Moi produced Owen's chart-topping 2011 album, *Barefoot Blue Jean Night*. That's when Big Loud Founder, Craig Wiseman, approached Zaruk and Moi about

going into business together, with Zaruk head of the management division at Big Loud Mountain that laid the foundation for Big Loud Records. The first act they signed was Florida Georgia Line.

Zaruk parted ways with Big Loud days before the pandemic hit in March 2020, which led to another new career venture. About six months later, he and business partner, Simon Tikhman, partnered with Live Nation to form their own management company, The Core Entertainment, that boasts a client roster of Nickelback, Nate Smith, Bailey Zimmerman and others. "I love helping artists develop and grow as human beings," Zaruk professes of the mission of The Core, which also puts an emphasis on artists' well-being and mental health. "Being able to share my experiences and my expertise of what I know and what I've seen and try to pass that on and hopefully help artists with this crazy business."

Zaruk takes that community spirit into his role as a CMA member. The industry veteran admits that when he first started coming to Nashville after working in rock music he felt like a "fish out of water," having limited knowledge of Country Music. For Zaruk, being a CMA member all boils down to the community. "When we started going to award shows and learning about the business, CMA always came up," he raves, adding that relationship-building and meeting other CMA members has been beneficial. "It was such an important piece to the culture of music, to the artists. The community of CMA and what it means and what it creates is part of what makes Country Music so special." He says that CMA fosters a pay-it-forward model wherein artists are compelled to help one another. He uses the annual CMA Fest as an example of how the organization aims to elevate all the artists and operates the festival with the mentality that there's enough room for everyone to succeed.

"In order for Country Music to thrive as a genre and Nashville to thrive, we need to be in this together," he observes of the CMA mentality. "Having done this now for 15 years in Nashville and seeing there is no other way to do it, I think now Country is bigger than ever because people are seeing the fruits of all these years of doing things the right way."



Photo: Courtesy of Chief Zaruk



Photo: Courtesy of Chief Zaruk



Photo: Courtesy of Chief Zaruk



# WHAT YOU MISSED AT "THE 57<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CMA AWARDS"

Country Music's Biggest Night™ took center stage live from Nashville's Bridgestone Arena on Wednesday, Nov. 8. While highlighting the genre's sky-rocketing global appeal, Country Music's past, present and future were celebrated at "The 57<sup>th</sup> Annual CMA Awards" as stars, fans and industry alike gathered to honor the format's legends while welcoming its brightest new voices. Returning for a second year in a row, co-hosts Luke Bryan and Peyton Manning couldn't hide their undeniable chemistry and kept the audience on their toes, delivering some of the night's funniest moments. Throughout the electric evening, Country's biggest names also hit the stage for one-of-a-kind collaborations and show-stopping solo performances viewers couldn't get anywhere else. The night was one to remember, but don't worry, for those who missed out on the fun, watch the unforgettable night streaming on Hulu now!

## CMA AWARDS WINNERS

**Entertainer of the Year - Lainey Wilson**

**Album of the Year - *Bell Bottom Country* by Lainey Wilson**

Producer: Jay Joyce

Mix Engineers: Jason Hall, Jay Joyce

**New Artist of the Year - Jelly Roll**

**Male Vocalist of the Year - Chris Stapleton**

**Female Vocalist of the Year - Lainey Wilson**

**Single of the Year - "Fast Car" by Luke Combs**

Producers: Luke Combs, Chip Matthews, Jonathan Singleton

Mix Engineer: Chip Matthews

**Song of the Year - "Fast Car" written by Tracy Chapman**

**Vocal Duo of the Year - Brothers Osborne**

**Vocal Group of the Year - Old Dominion**

**Musical Event of the Year - "wait in the truck" by HARDY feat. Lainey Wilson**

Producers: HARDY, Joey Moi, Jordan Schmidt, Derek Wells

**Music Video of the Year - "wait in the truck" by HARDY feat. Lainey Wilson**

Director: Justin Clough

**Musician of the Year - Jenee Fleenor**



Photo: Acacia Evans/CMA



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA



Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA





Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA

## CMA BROADCAST AWARD WINNERS

### CMA BROADCAST PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR

#### Weekly National

"Country Countdown USA" (Lon Helton) - Compass Media Networks

#### Daily National

"Angie Ward" (Angie Ward) - iHeartMedia

#### Major Market

"Hawkeye in the Morning with Hawkeye and Michelle" ("Hawkeye" Mark Louis Rybczyk and Michelle Rodriguez) - KSCS, Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas

#### Large Market

"The Wayne D Show" ("Wayne D" Danielson and Tay Hamilton) - WSIX, Nashville, Tenn

#### Medium Market

"Mo & StyckMan" (Melissa "Mo" Wagner and Greg "StyckMan" Owens) - WUSY, Chattanooga, Tenn.

#### Small Market

"Steve, Ben and Nikki" (Steve Stroud, Ben Walker and Nikki Thomas) - WXBQ, Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol, Tenn.-Va.

### CMA RADIO STATION OF THE YEAR

#### Major Market

KEYE - Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minn.

#### Large Market

WUBE - Cincinnati, Ohio

#### Medium Market

KUZZ - Bakersfield, Calif.

#### Small Market

WXBQ - Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol, Tenn.-Va.



# EVENT RECAPS

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

### 2023 CMA WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY PARTICIPANTS:

#### Courtney Allen

(Senior Director of A&R, Concord Music Publishing)

#### Charlotte Burke Bass

(Founder, Beeline Agency LLC)

#### Samantha Borenstein

(Artist Manager, Vector Management)

#### Stephanie Davenport

(Vice President of A&R, Warner Music Nashville)

#### Halie Hampton Mosley

(Chief Operating Officer, WHY&HOW)

#### Meg Kehoe

(Head of Media, Sony Music Nashville)

#### Mallori Kirchenschlager

(Business Manager, Luma Business Services)

#### Allison Laughter

(Vice President of Digital, Marketing and Streaming, Red Light Management)

#### Kaitlyn Moore

(Vice President of Marketing, mtheory)

#### Jessica Myers

(Vice President of Rights Management, Big Machine Label Group)

#### Rachel Powers

(Vice President, Messina Touring Group)

#### Kylen Sharpe

(Agent, CAA)

#### Molly Shehan

(Partner/Attorney, Milom Crow Kelley Beckett Shehan PLC)

#### Taylor Smith Tileston

(Tour Manager, Little Big Town)

#### Heather Vassar

(Vice President, EMPIRE)



Photo: Drew Noble/CMA

CMA has concluded another incredible year of its Women's Leadership Academy. Selected through an application process, the professional development program is an interactive group coaching experience for high-performing, high-potential women leaders within Country Music.

The 15-week program kicked off in July and wrapped up with a celebratory reception in October. At the start of the program, members took part in a one-on-one coaching session to establish individual goals and set success measures before participating in seven educational sessions as a group as well as

group coaching sessions twice a month throughout the entirety of the program.

Throughout the 15 weeks, participants were coached by expert executive coaches, Diane Watson, PCC, and Cory Colton, PCC, BCC, and received tools and insight surrounding increased self-awareness and how to use it strategically, confidence building and communicating effectively, managing inner criticism to unleash further potential, building a personal brand and networking successfully, as well as creating a better work-life integration by setting boundaries.

## INDUSTRY HONORS

**Jeannie Seely** - Joe Talbot Award

**Darius Rucker** - CMA Foundation Humanitarian Award

**Marcus K. Dowling** - Media Achievement Award

**Mike Dungan** - Irving Waugh Award of Excellence

**Jim Free** - J. William Denny Award



Marcus K. Dowling, Jelly Roll, K-Michelle  
Photo: Josh Brasted/CMA



Jeannie Seely  
Photo: Chris Hollo Photography/  
Grand Ole Opry



Jim Free Photo: Jamie Schramm/CMA



Darius Rucker and Mike Dungan  
Photo: Josh Russell/CMA



Darius Rucker  
Photo: Weiss Eubanks/NBCUniversal



# CMA AWARDS NOMINEE DINNER

Just ahead of "The 57th Annual CMA Awards," CMA hosted a celebratory dinner at Saint Elle in Nashville on Wednesday, Nov. 1 to honor this year's CMA Awards nominees.

CMA CEO Sarah Trahern welcomed attendees and invited CMA Awards Executive Producer Robert Deaton to lead a special toast for the group. Attendees enjoyed an elegantly decorated venue in moody-fall fashion with warm tones and touches of gold. Florals from Nashville-based FLWR Shop added a beautiful natural element to the tables and enhanced the perfectly blended modern and historic architecture of the venue. The menu was curated by renowned chef and James Beard Award-winning restaurateur Sean Brock (Audrey, Husk, The Continental, Joyland). With his mission to contribute to the local community, culture and cuisine in a lasting and impactful way, Brock honored this year's deserving nominees through an evening of exquisite food and celebration.



# CMA EDU LEADERSHIP SUMMIT



CMA welcomed the CMA EDU Class of 2023 to CMA HQ July 30–August 1 for the 10th annual CMA EDU Leadership Summit, which included three days of professional development training, industry education and community-building opportunities for college students.

CMA is dedicated to equipping and supporting the next generation of leaders as they step into their careers with confidence. CMA EDU is a culmination of those efforts, providing students with tools, resources and community-building opportunities as well as giving them a firsthand look into the music business. With a 91% job placement rate for those graduating from the program, this year's summit welcomed the CMA EDU Class of 2023-2024, made up of 39 students from 20 universities across the country.



Throughout the multi-day experience, CMA EDU students heard from industry veterans and leaders on a variety of topics, touching on all facets of the music business. They heard a conversation moderated by Brittany Schaffer, Dean of the Mike Curb College at Belmont University, with Country artist Megan Moroney and her team including Taylor Lindsey, Head of A&R for Sony Music Nashville, Elisa Vazzana, UTA Agent, and Juli Griffith, Artist Manager and Owner at PunchBowl Entertainment, highlighting Moroney's journey in the music industry and offering advice for those breaking into the business. Touring professional Mike Finn hosted a conversation about the touring landscape while Charlie Morgan, Apple Music's Head of Music Programming and CMA Board Chairman, spoke to attendees about streaming and the future of music.



Digital marketing agency, Girilla Marketing, hosted a panel with Stevie Zea Escoto, Senior Managing Director, Lindsey Feinstein, Account Director, Gigi Morrison, Junior Creative Manager, and Kate Cacopardo, Account Coordinator, focused on cultivating brand identity and the importance of personal branding. Music publishing company, Concord, gave students a firsthand look at publishing, curating a discussion with Brad Kennard, Senior Vice President, A&R, Courtney Allen, Senior Director, A&R and 2023 CMA Women's Leadership Academy member, Mike Turner, Senior Director, A&R, and Andy Albert, singer-songwriter, about the role of publishing within the music industry ecosystem. Country artist Russell Dickerson also made a surprise appearance during the conversation, discussing songwriting, performing and his experience in the business.

Applications for the 2024-2025 program year are now open. To learn more about applying for the next CMA EDU class, visit [cma-edu.com](http://cma-edu.com).



# LUKE COMBS

## BEHIND THE MAKING OF AN INTERNATIONAL CAREER

By Cindy Watts

*Luke Combs capped his world tour in October, having played 44 shows in 16 countries on three continents. The geographic sprawl stretches from large capacity venues in Texas to Canada, New Zealand to Norway and Germany to England—enough to prompt his team to call the Luke Combs World Tour the largest for a Country artist in history.*

Brussels, Belgium Photo: David Bergman

Combs started working with his manager, Chris Kappy, about seven years ago, and Kappy has had the plan for Combs' international success just as long. He told Combs that "planting his flag" in the international touring circuit would cost him money and time but that he could be the person to help spearhead the Country Music genre around the globe.

"We always planned on Luke being an international act," says Kappy, founder and owner of management company Make Wake Artists. "As soon as we started playing in the Southeast, I couldn't wait to get to Texas. As soon as we got to Texas, I couldn't wait to get to California. As soon as we got to California, I couldn't wait to get to Canada."

People frequently asked why Combs and his team weren't slowing down and enjoying the success, and Kappy says the answer was simple. They wanted to set the standard for international touring success as a Country artist.

"If we're going to be a national act, we have to play the coasts," Kappy points out. "If we're going to be an international act, we have to play outside of America. And if we want Country Music to expand, we have to blaze the path and figure it out. Even though other acts had done it, I think we had the opportunity to really set a new standard for it."

Milly Olykan, CMA's Vice President of International Relations & Development agrees with this sentiment, telling *CMA Close Up*, "Country Music's growth as a genre depends upon it going global. Unlike other genres, like pop or rock, Country Music has historically focused on U.S. markets, so establishing a strong international scene is huge to its success. It illustrates to artists and their teams that there is a fan base out there, and that if they spend time in these markets, they can grow a significant audience globally."

Kappy couldn't have anticipated the price Combs would pay for 2023's bold and expansive world tour. The new dad was playing arenas in Australia when his second son was born (early) in August. But he's proud of the work they did while there. Often, Country artists who headline North America's most prominent venues must start over at the bottom, playing clubs in other countries. Combs slid into large-scale venues—even in areas like Scandinavia that aren't known for being fans of the genre.

“...we learned he was never referred to this time around as Luke Combs, the Country artist. He was just referred to as Luke Combs...”

To convince promoters to agree to the aggressive booking strategy, Combs' team developed and executed an intricate plan to prove his universal reach.

The singer's agent, Aaron Tannenbaum, a partner at Nashville's WME office, explains that in terms of strategy, Combs' European tour was the most complex tour he's had the pleasure of working on. He and the international team at WME believed they had a huge opportunity with Combs' tour. But there weren't many precedents on which international promoters could calibrate their expectations.

He explained their solution was to route several tours within the tour to provide maximum flexibility in venue size and their ability to upgrade. As Combs quickly filled smaller venues to capacity, his team was able to move the show to larger buildings to accommodate more people.

“On paper, seeing a Country artist sell over 10,000 tickets in a market they haven't been to before is exciting, but more than that, being there in person and seeing how young the fans are, how they know all the songs, and seeing the local music industry being so excited about it—it felt like a game changer,” says Olykan.

For example, Combs was originally booked in a 1,500-capacity club in Copenhagen, Denmark, before ultimately upgrading to the 12,000-seat Royal Arena. The planning had already been done, so making the venue change was done in real time over Zoom calls during the presale so as not to break the momentum and marketing driving the global on-sale.

“We had an ‘if this then that’ plan for every market in advance,” Tannenbaum says. “We had every promoter on separate Zoom channels, and we would all make decisions as a unit. All of this was done for every market where laws allowed upgrades without refunding all tickets and starting over. We were successful in our ascension to the larger venues in every scenario.”

“CMA collaborated with Luke's management, Sony Nashville and WME to host a pre-show reception at many of these shows,” continues Olykan. “We invited the music industry and media to see a large-scale Country show, see who the fans are, and to engage with us, and we came away with so many new relationships and learnings.”

From a managerial standpoint, song selection and release strategy for Combs' 2023 album *Gettin' Old* also played a part. Combs' team ensured that early fan favorite “5 Leaf Clover” was the focus track in the U.S., but his cover of Tracy Chapman's “Fast Car” was the featured track everywhere else.

“The goal was to use ‘Fast Car’ to pull people into the format, into his catalog,” Kappy says. “And when we went overseas, we learned he was never referred to this time around as Luke Combs, the Country artist. He was just referred to as Luke Combs, like Ed Sheeran or Taylor Swift.”

Tannenbaum agrees, adding that the genre in which Combs is categorized doesn't matter because his live shows speak for themselves.



Brisbane, Australia Photo: David Bergman

“The fact that [Luke] established himself in a format that traditionally doesn't extend globally is not a limiting factor for him,” Tannenbaum says. “The success he has achieved globally so far is proof. We are just getting started.”

“Our vision is that Country Music can be as present as rock and pop is internationally,” Olykan states. “Our focus is getting Country Music present in mainstream environments, and Luke's tour has demonstrated what is possible—those concerts helped to shift perceptions and engage media and industry in various markets in a way we haven't seen before.”

CMA members should stay tuned as CMA will host an international touring-focused MemberSIPS event highlighting the upcoming festivals taking place in a host of territories in March. Details are forthcoming.



Glasgow, Scotland Photo: David Bergman



Melbourne, Australia Photo: David Bergman





Paris, France Photo: David Bergman



Belfast, Northern Ireland Photo: David Bergman



# CMA LIFETIME MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

# ANDIE SUMMERS

**SUMMERS IS A TWO-TIME CMA MAJOR MARKET BROADCAST PERSONALITY WINNER AND IS NOW A LIFETIME MEMBER**

By Lisa Valentine

For Andie Summers, hosting a morning radio show is about so much more than waking her audience with great Country Music. The two-time CMA Major Market Broadcast Personality has spent 24 years at Beasley's WXTU in Philadelphia actively seeking to make a difference in her beloved community.

"There's a big responsibility," says Summers who co-hosts "The Andie Summers Show" with Jeff Kurkjian. "We have this opportunity with our microphones to reach so many people, and it's always been my philosophy to make sure that I'm making people smile and I'm using that privilege for good."

Though she has become a fixture in the format, Summers admits Country radio wasn't her first choice as a career. She was a Mass Communications major at Pennsylvania's Bloomsburg University with an eye on a career in television when a friend suggested she apply for a part-time job at a 6,000-watt Country station to build her resume. "I went in for my interview and the program director said, 'So do you like Country Music?'" she recalls. She confessed that she didn't. "He was like, 'Can you tolerate it for about four hours at a time?' I was like, 'Yes, I'm sure.' I knew nothing about it at all, but they must've been really desperate, or he just really appreciated my honesty."

To her surprise she immediately fell in love with the music. "I remember there being windows in the studio, and I was in the town of Bloomsburg and I thought, 'Everyone is watching me dance right now. I just loved it,'" she says of playing Faith Hill, Alan Jackson, Joe Diffie, Randy Travis, Trisha Yearwood and many others. "I thought, 'Okay, this is where I belong.' So the longer I did it, the more I fell in love with it."

In May 2024 Summers will celebrate her 25th anniversary at WXTU, and she's still in awe of the artists whose music she plays. "Dolly Parton put it best," she says. "They're ordinary people telling ordinary stories in an extraordinary way."

Summers also has high praise for her listeners, who are known as the XTU Nation. "We really are a family. I've been here half of my life so these people have truly raised me," she says. "I love that I still talk to people who were in their twenties when they started listening and now they've become parents, and in some cases grandparents. I love that their kids and their grandkids are also listening. It's just this whole big cycle. We're in it together. We rely on each other. I learn so much from them. Hopefully I'm able to impart some wisdom sometimes, but really, everything is about our audience."

When Summers learned there was a man in their community who needed a kidney transplant, she had him on the air and her audience responded enthusiastically in trying to help him secure a donor. She loves seeing her community rally to help others, and several people offered to donate a kidney if they were a match.

As proud as she is of her Philly community, Summers is equally effusive about being a CMA member. "Just like we've got this amazing village here in Philadelphia, I think that life just takes a village, and the CMA family has become my village professionally," she says. "I love and appreciate how well the organization celebrates and supports both people who are in the spotlight and those who are creating the spotlight, those who work behind the scenes."

Summers has won two Gracie Awards from the Alliance for Women in Media Foundation (AWM) and CMA Major Market Broadcast Personality in 2013 and 2022. For those hoping to emulate her successful career, Summers offers this advice: "As much as times have changed and the industry has changed, I think that good old-fashioned work ethic hasn't changed and that's what gets you places. So, my biggest piece of advice would be shoot for the stars but know that you're not going to start there. You start at the bottom, and you learn everything you can on your way up because knowledge is power."

Summers credits her start at that small station for providing that knowledge, which was extremely valuable during lean times in the industry when there were layoffs. "I truly had my hand in every aspect of it," she recalls of that first station gig. "I could do on air. I could do promotions. I could do production. I went on sales calls. So that made me valuable at a time when a lot of people who could only do one thing were being let go. So, the more you know, the more you can do, the more value you add to your employer because the bottom line is it's a job. They're a company and they've got to make the best decision for their company too. You have to put yourself in a position to be the best decision for that company."

Summers' work ethic has continually served her well. "Honestly, my favorite thing is just making people smile," she says. "I love hearing, 'I always know that I'm going to be in a good mood when I listen to 'The Andie Summers Show.'" There's no greater compliment to me because that just means all the work that I'm doing is paying off. It's so gratifying."



Photo: Courtesy of Andie Summers



Photo: Courtesy of Andie Summers



Photo: Courtesy of Andie Summers



# TANYA



# TUCKER

**FROM BREAKOUT TEENAGE STAR TO  
COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME MEMBER**

*As Told to CMA Close Up by Brenda Lee*



## *Tanya Tucker was voted in as one of three members of the 2023 Country Music Hall of Fame inductees, along with Patty Loveless and Bob McDill. Tucker was inducted into the Veterans Era Artist category at the Medallion Ceremony in the CMA Theater at the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum on October 22, 2023.*

I've known Tanya since she was 13 years old. She's a free spirit. She is going to be Tanya Tucker no matter what anybody says. You can either like her or love her, but she's gonna be who she is.

I met Tanya on 18th Avenue South. I don't know if the restaurant is still there, it was called The Peddler. My manager and I went in, and I guess it was her dad that came to the table and said, "I'm Beau Tucker. Would you come and meet my daughter Tanya?" and I said, "I sure will!" So, I went over, and I met her. She was precious, kind of like she is today. She's her own person. She walks to the beat of a different drum. She's as precious as she can be though, and I'm glad that she's been my friend all these years.

You wouldn't think that if you never saw a person and went a long time without seeing them or talking to them, when you did see them, you hugged and hollered and kissed on the cheeks, you did everything. You would say to yourself, "Why'd you do that, you haven't seen her in months and months and months?" But that just shows you something about Tanya and it shows you something about me. It shows when you are true friends, it doesn't matter how long it is 'til you see each other. What matters is that you see each other.

She does things on the spur of the moment. She called us one night at two o'clock in the morning. She said, "I've got the plane all ready. I'm going to the Bahamas! Do y'all want to go?" And Ronnie said, "Who the hell is that?" I said, "It's just Tanya!" He said, "Oh, alright, tell her no, we're in bed." But she's just unpredictable.

When I said [at the induction ceremony that] she was one of the people in the industry that stayed real, she stayed real because she is real. She's a real, down-to-earth mother, provider, friend and entertainer, and if you ever need somebody that's trustworthy, I would say, "Go see Tanya." Because she is just that kind.

It meant a lot to me to induct Tanya into the Hall after all the years that I've blown my horn for her. It meant so much to me because I knew it meant a lot to Tanya. You look at Tanya and you think, "Aw, she's just fluffing this off or she doesn't really care," and that's not true. She was so, so, so excited and so grateful and deserving. She's worked long and hard in this industry.

Her style of music certainly has worked. You may like it; you may not like it. You may understand it;

you may not understand it. But Tanya is one of those artists, if she understands it and she likes it, she doesn't care if you do or not. She's going to do it, come hell or high water, and that's what you've got to love about her.

The legacy I think that she will leave (on the Country Music genre) is that she never gave up or gave in to who she was. She was always who she was. She makes no apologies. You either like her or you don't. And most people like her because when you get through that veneer of hers, you see the talent and that's what we love anyway.

Before we love the people behind the music, we love the music. Then you say, "Oh, I wonder who that was?" and then you look them up. And I think that's why she's stayed around: because she's real, she doesn't hide anything from the public (although she should sometimes).

***Brenda Lee is a Country Music Hall of Fame member, a CMA member for more than four decades, as well as a member of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and the Rockabilly Hall of Fame.***





# INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

## WITH COUNTRY ARTIST FRANK RAY AND MUSIC TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE STEPHEN LAWRENCE-CARROLL

*Country artist Frank Ray sat down via Zoom with 2023 Music Teacher of Excellence and Director of Orchestral and Music Theory at North Atlanta High School in Atlanta, GA, Stephen Lawrence-Carroll, to catch up. Lawrence-Carroll was honored, along with 29 other extraordinary music teachers, in September at the CMA Foundation's annual Music Teachers of Excellence ceremony. Ray was also part of the night, closing the ceremony with a few heartfelt words about the impact music education has had in his own life. Read their conversation below.*



Stephen Lawrence-Carroll Photo: Courtesy of Stephen Lawrence Carroll

### Frank Ray

How long have you known about the CMA Foundation and the Music Teachers of Excellence program?

### Stephen Lawrence-Carroll

I have a few colleagues who were Music Teachers of Excellence from my district in the past that I have seen post about CMA, but I didn't really know much about it. My best friend was also in one of the first classes, so he told me a little bit about it as well. They all just reached out and said, "You know, you should apply for this because it sounds like it would be right up your alley," so I did. And I can say, it's been one of the best experiences. As it progresses, and the fact that it's still happening, and that I'm still doing things like this interview

has made it really, really different from a lot of other things that I've experienced.

### Ray

I think that's something really cool about the CMA Foundation, because obviously, CMA is prominently known for its role in Country Music, but the CMA Foundation takes it 10 steps further and says, "Hey, you know, music is not just about Country Music, it's about all different types of music and different styles."

You mentioned that you're the teacher of orchestral music at your school. Has that always been the kind of music that interested you?

### Lawrence-Carroll

Music was definitely where I spent all my time. It

was the first place I went to when I was in school in the morning, and the last place I was in the evening. When I first started, I tried trombone and that didn't work out very well. So, I went over and tried orchestra, because I had friends there, and you know, it just made sense for me. It was the fun that I wanted to have. It was always about having fun and being with friends, and then it became something that I got more and more interested in.

When I was younger, listening to classical music wasn't of interest to me. But when you start to make the connection with it, and you start to understand what's going on with the composer and why they made these choices, you start to have emotional reactions and connect with it in a different way.

Being able to hear the story that's going on, even when there aren't words associated with it - those are moments in class that I want my students to experience - the vulnerability, the emotional experience. Those moments are what I'm trying to pass on.

### Ray

What would you say about the importance of having music in schools?

### Lawrence-Carroll

We have all heard about the research stating that music builds integrity with students, discipline, seeing things through, as well as test scores being higher. But it also helps to create a connection between the school and the community, no matter what community you're coming from. Music is an important part of our life, and when you are able to take those things that are culturally representative, as well as educational, you can intertwine social interactions and make something really great.

### Ray

I'm moved right now listening to you speak. It inspires me to go downstairs and create! My daughter is in the next room playing piano and



it's one of those things where I'm just grateful for the influence and the inspiration that I had as a kid, and I'm grateful to teachers like yourself for your dedication to your craft, your expertise and your contribution to music and education.

I'm also grateful for programs like [Music Teachers of Excellence] and organizations like the CMA Foundation for keeping programs like that alive. I remember I heard about the program a few years back, and it is honestly my favorite event of the year. It's incredible to see the artists, the producers and the people in the industry that are used to being recognized saying, "Hey, you know what, none of this would exist without the music educators that inspired us and grew up with us." I think taking a night to recognize that is necessary. I believe we should do it more often!

### Lawrence-Carroll

The Music Teachers of Excellence program has been phenomenal because for me as a teacher, it helps to recognize and validate my expertise in this field. It is still crazy to me that you can be rewarded for doing things that you love. I really love doing this, and it is so much fun every single day. So, to gain recognition because you have fun with something is amazing. I know that it's more than that, but it just helps to foster a sense of professional accomplishment. The recognition inspires confidence and trust within my students, parents and administrators. Those types of things just make it a lot easier to keep doing what I'm doing and to continue having fun with the kids and trying to get better each day.

### Ray

It has quickly become my favorite event of the year. It's so heartwarming. It moves my soul. I am so grateful to be a part of it, and I hope to see you there again next year.



Photo Courtesy of Stephen Lawrence-Carroll

Frank Ray Photo: Nathan Zucker/CMA



Photo Courtesy of Stephen Lawrence-Carroll



A portrait of Michael Farris, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office setting with vertical blinds.

Get to Know...

# MICHAEL FARRIS

*CMA Senior Director, Business Strategy and Insights*

Photo: John Russell/CMA

## How did you make your way to CMA?

When my wife and I moved to Nashville 7 years ago, I was working with an Atlanta-based sport marketing agency leading their consulting and research efforts. I loved the role I was in, and where it was developing beyond just the data. I was in a hybrid space getting to play with strategy and revenue development, ticketing, the live event experience, and research elements, which stretched my skills and interest. Ultimately, the travel with that career didn't align with our family goals. I felt a pull to look for something Nashville-based that tied together my love for music and the opportunity to continue working in a similar capacity to what I had in sport. CMA was a perfect fit.

## What made you want to pursue a career in research?

As an undergrad, I was introduced to consumer behavior and market research through great professors that stressed the creativity, application, and value of research. It immediately struck a chord with me, and I dove headfirst in working on research projects about how people develop fandom in sport. It was fascinating being able to connect the dots on the "why" with how we, as humans, behave. I had every intention to take this interest to being a tenure-track professor where I could teach and do research full-time, but had a great mentor push me to get out in the industry to get real-world experience. Once I got the high from connecting "a-ha" moments to tangible outcomes, I never turned back from industry. I'll still take any opportunity I can to get in the classroom though.

## What are some of the key trends you are seeing across our genre?

We can't talk about trends without talking about the massive growth in consumption we are witnessing in the format during 2023. Through Q3 of this year, Country is averaging 2.22 billion audio and video streams each week. For comparison, last year, the format averaged 1.78 billion streams each week (in 2023, we've only had one week under last year's average which was week 1!). As we look towards the future with consumption, it will be interesting to monitor the rising subscription costs across media services (music, TV, etc.) for the potential impact this will have on the conversion and retention of music listeners on various streaming subscriptions, including their willingness to pay. Another trend that we're witnessing is how the fan is becoming more of a focal point, especially as the industry continues to accent the value of 'superfans'. This is driving a need for creators, artists, marketers, and others

to be more mindful about the ownership and usage rights of their first-party data to ensure they are reaping the value of maintaining their fan base. As algorithms continue to be an ever-increasing element for how we engage on social and music platforms, it's vital to truly know who our fans are so we can develop community and ensure they are receiving the right messages at the right time in the right ways to build fans for life.

## How can members utilize CMA as a resource for research, data and other insights?

Reach out to us and share the challenges you are thinking through or the stories you are trying to tell with data. Whether you are trying to size our industry, get a pulse on consumption trends, or understand our consumer make up, CMA is likely to have data that relates to the topic. And, if we don't, we want to know what matters to you so we can source that data and be able to share it in the future. Our team wants to serve as a trusted resource for data and insights regarding the Country Music audience, music consumption, and cultural trends that impact our business. The best way we can accomplish this is by gathering varied perspectives across the industry to inform ways that we can provide intel to support our members and beyond.


## When you aren't at work, what do you like to do for fun?

I guess I would classify dealing with and encouraging the chaos of my 5- and 3-year-old kids as fun. Otherwise, I'm still trying to hang on to being a kid myself by sneaking out to concerts, hanging out with my long-distance friends playing video games, and discussing Star Wars fan theories. Although as I'm maturing into family life, I'm enjoying traveling and being outdoors with the family. Then, settling in for a nightcap with any book, movie, or TV series usually in the Western genre.

## If you had to recommend one song to someone looking to explore Country Music, what song would you recommend?

One song is tough as a consumer behavior person that wants to custom fit a song recommendation for everyone based on where they might lean in the "big tent" of Country Music. But, if my back is against a wall, my default is always Patty Loveless' version of "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive," written by Darrell Scott. That recording is such a great example of the storytelling, emotion, and talent that exists within Country Music.



A photograph of the Judds, Naomi and Wynonna, at the 1984 CMA Awards. Naomi is on the left, wearing a black and blue outfit, and Wynonna is on the right, wearing a pink dress. Both are holding glass awards. The background is a stage with blue and gold lighting.

**On the strength of “Mama He’s Crazy” and the six-song *Wynonna & Naomi* EP, The Judds won the Horizon Award at the 1984 CMA Awards ceremony, where Naomi famously began her acceptance speech by exclaiming, “Slap the dog and spit in the fire!” They released their first full-length album, *Why Not Me*, the following week.**

Photo: Don Putnam/CMA



HOSTED BY TRISHA YEARWOOD & AMY GRANT

# CMA

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