The Summit Newsletter

The 2026 ISSA Awards Show



The 2026 International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) Awards nomination period opened on January 1 and closes at noon on March 30th. During this time, self-nomination forms will be available for artists who meet the eligibility criteria. To qualify, artists must have a dedicated website, at least five songs available on major platforms like iTunes or Spotify, and an engaged fan base. This fan support plays a key role in helping nominees advance to the finalist stage, with finalists being announced on April 2nd.

Throughout the month of April, from April 2 to April 30, fans will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite nominees. Only self-nominations will be accepted; radio stations, promoters, and ISSA representatives may not nominate artists and do not need to meet the artist-specific criteria.

After the fan voting period concludes at the end of April, the selection process will continue into May and throughout the summer. During this time, ISSA judges—comprised of Gold Level winners from the past two years—will review the finalists and select the winners. Those chosen will receive crystal awards at the official ISSA Awards ceremony held at the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center in Atlanta, Georgia in August.

The annual ISSA AWARDS show is held at the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, right in the heart of **Atlanta,** Georgia (in the same venue where the Annual **BMI Awards** are also held). This ISSA Summit will be held on Thursday & Friday (August 21st & 22nd) along with a Pre-party the evening prior to the show at 5pm, and an After Party immediately following the show at the (**Wild Wing Café, Alpharetta)** just a thirty minute drive away.

This prestigious event features **plush red-carpet entrance and gorgeous banners**, complete with **professional photographers**, **professional videographers** and is the talk of the town with several local celebrities on the **red-carpet conducting interviews** with our finalists, which will be available for download for free.

With a full production crew to assist with anything you may need, from hotel reservations, concierge, airline travel for our international attendees, and more, the ISSA Team is always ready for our annual event! Ask away, we have answers!



Is A Shuttle Bus Needed For This Year?

We have not heard back from anyone who wants to assume the responsibilities of procuring and coordinating the Shuttle Bus for this year's Summit. Although this was a huge hit by those who used it last year, we may have to forego the service for this year's show if we don't find someone to take this on! If this is a task that you would like to take on, then please email Angela Marie Eidenmiller or Todd Apfel. We can supply you with names and contacts at the companies we considered and worked with last year.

Deja-vu??

You may be noticing that some of our articles are repeats from previous issues, it's not because we're trying to fill up space. These are areas that we still need your help for us to make this year's Summit even more of a success than last year! The reason the ISSA is such a great organization is because of each and every one of you and your involvement.



Seeking Sponsors for the 2026 Summit

We need your help to make the upcoming 2026 Summit a success! Sponsorships play a vital role in covering essential costs such as conference room rentals, speaker fees, and the creation of memorable swag bags filled with exciting items for attendees. These contributions not only ensure the event runs smoothly but also enhance the overall experience for everyone involved.

Believe it or not, each one of us probably either work for, or know of a business that would love to have exposure with our attendees at the Summit, on our Website, Facebook page and this Newsletter. By reaching out to potential sponsors, you can help us secure the resources needed to bring this event to life. Whether it's a local business, a corporate partner, or an organization aligned with our mission, every connection counts. We would be glad to accept whatever they have to offer. It can be a product for raffle, promo items (koozies, stickers, picks, pens, magnets, key chains, etc..) for the Swag Bags, or cash to help defray the costs. Please have them email Todd Apfel or Angela Marie Eidenmiller for more information.



Mid-Winter Retreat

Although it seemed that there was a lot of interest in this idea, the lack of responses has prompted us to cancel having a retreat this year.



This Month's Sponsor Spotlight features Sam George - Owner, Producer, Mixing / Mastering Engineer and Composer at Mammoth Sound Studios

Sam George delivers high-impact music production and engineering for artists, bands, and media projects that demand clarity, weight, and intent. His work spans full-scale record production, recording, mixing, mastering, and Dolby Atmos, with a focus on creating records that are compelling before they ever reach the mix.

He works as both a creative partner and a technical authority, shaping sound, structure, and performance into cohesive, release-ready records.

Services
• Music Production
• Recording, Mixing & Mastering
• Dolby Atmos & Immersive Audio
• Composition, Songwriting & Arrangement

An award-winning artist, songwriter, and producer, Sam has received international recognition including:
* Best International Male Album (ISSA 2025),
* Best Collaboration (World Songwriting Awards 2025),
* Best Producer (The Elite Music Awards 2025).

His approach is deliberate and artist-focused. Every decision serves the song, the narrative, and the long-term identity of the project, not trends, shortcuts, or fixes in the mix.

http://www.mammothsoundstudio.com/

Artist Spotlight is a new feature that we'll be including every month. This month's inaugural artist is:

Michale Botte!



Hear the Difference: Michael Botte Band's Album Showcases Legendary Producer Bob Beals

Independent artists often face the daunting task of transforming raw song ideas into polished, radio-ready tracks. For the **Michael Botte Band**, this challenge was brilliantly met by collaborating with a true veteran of the music industry: **Bob Beals** of **Sound Foundation Studios** in Canton, Ohio.

The Michael Botte Band's latest release, the 8-song album **"Demos & Diamonds Vol. 1,"** offers listeners a unique and compelling glimpse into the transformative power of elite music production. The album is structured around a fascinating concept: it pairs four original song demos with their final, fully produced studio counterparts. This side-by-side comparison serves as an indisputable showcase of Bob Beals' incredible skills, honed over **45+ years** in the business.

The Art of Transformation

The album title perfectly encapsulates the journey each track takes under Beals' guidance. The **"Demos"** represent the raw, fundamental musical ideas—the diamonds in the rough. The **"Diamonds"** are the final, sparkling cuts, elevated by Beals' expert arrangement, mixing, and mastering. Listening to the before-and-after versions, the difference is night and day. Where a demo might have been acoustically sparse or minimally mixed, the final track bursts with professional fidelity, dynamic range, and emotional depth. It's a masterclass in how an experienced producer can sculpt sound, highlighting the artist's vision while bringing technical excellence to the forefront.

Over the course of their collaboration, Michael Botte Band and Bob Beals have won awards, topped music charts, and released a total of **14 songs** together, building a strong, successful partnership. Beals' consistent ability to deliver exceptional results is the foundation of their joint success.

A New Chapter for Sound Foundation Studios
After decades of impactful work, Bob Beals is officially opening his studio doors and is **now accepting new artists** for production projects at Sound Foundation Studios. This is an extraordinary opportunity for emerging and established musicians to work with a producer whose expertise can genuinely elevate their music to a commercial standard.

To celebrate this new chapter and support the independent music community, Bob Beals is extending a special offer. He has agreed to give all **ISSA members** (International Singer-Songwriter Association) a **$200 credit** off the first song produced by him. As an added bonus, this production package **includes free music promotion** to help the resulting track find its audience. This is more than just a discount; it's an investment in quality and exposure. If you're ready to turn your own musical "demos" into true "diamonds," partnering with a seasoned professional like Bob Beals is the essential next step. Contact Sound Foundation Studios today to take advantage of this fantastic opportunity and experience the professional difference that only 45+ years of production mastery can provide.

I want my light to dim so that Bobs light can shine!!!

"For more information, please text or call Bob 330.599.3372 or email bob.beals@soundfoundationstudios.com"



Michael has a new single "Broken" arriving on January 23rd. You can find out more about Michael and his music at

https://michaelbotteband.com/



Tamanie's Notes

Join your global ISSA family this August in Atlanta for an unforgettable celebration of music and an unparalleled opportunity to fuel your career. The **2026 ISSA Awards Show** on August 22nd is much more than a prestigious ceremony; it is a premier industry event that brings together artists, songwriters, producers, and professionals from around the world to celebrate creativity and achievement

By attending, you will walk the same plush red carpet and be celebrated in the same professional venue—the Byers Theater at the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center—as the renowned BMI Awards, enjoying full production support and the chance to be featured on ISSA TV . This is your moment to gain global recognition!

Elevate your experience further by arriving early for the **free ISSA Summit**, a dedicated two-day event designed to help you "Learn the Business. Build the Career" . This summit offers invaluable education through keynote speakers, breakout workshops, and industry panels, all aimed at providing real-world strategies for independent artists . Beyond the awards and education, the week is packed with essential networking at the Pre-Party and After-Party, where you can forge lasting connections with a community of over 20,000 members worldwide . Attending isn't just about watching an awards show—it's about actively investing in your future, building your professional network, and becoming part of a powerful global movement that provides year-round support and opportunities . Mark your calendar for August 20th - 22nd and prepare for a transformative experience in Atlanta.





Tips From Our Members

One of the great benefits of being a member of the ISSA is that we have so many members that are here to help you out with industry questions. This month's featured articles are from Angela Marie Eidenmiller (ISSA Associate Director of Artist Relations), Sam George (ISSA Member) and Michael Botte (ISSA Philadelphia Representative).



Just One Tip

Welcome to this Month's edition of "Just One Tip", presented by "ON THE MIC WITH MICHAEL BOTTE" in partnership with Sound Foundation Studios, where I post a "TIP" I have learned either through experimentation or from observing others smarter than me LOL!

This month is all about Meta Business Suite.

Facebooks "Meta Business Suite" located on your pages "home page".

This is where I go to schedule just about every post you see up to 3 weeks in advance and it allows me to SIMULTANEOUSLY post to Instagram as well (I don't really use this, but I should). I DO NOT post much during the work week (other than a reply, a thank you, a reaction, etc…) because I spend time on weekend mornings over a cup of coffee scheduling my posts so I can be efficient and deliberate. Like most, I do have a full-time career so the work week can get busy.

Look at my Facebook timeline. Most of my posts are me GRACIOUSLY THANKING the amazing radio stations that play my music and have been incredibly loyal to me! All of these are planned and staggered posts.

There is also a "planner" where I can see my scheduled posts and make changes if needed.

So COOL!!!! As an ISSA Representative, I must ensure I am serving my community.

PS - If you need AFFORDABLE AND PROFESSIONAL music production and promotion, please message or email me michaelbotteband@gmail.com

Thank you, family



Great Records Are Built Not Fixed.

The foundations of a great sounding record are laid long before the mix begins. Mixing is not where quality is created, it is where quality is revealed.

The real goal should be to make a recording that cannot be ruined in the mix, rather than hoping a mix can rescue a weak recording. That starts with arrangement. If parts fight each other, occupy the same emotional or frequency space, or exist without purpose, no amount of processing will make them feel intentional.

A strong arrangement leads naturally to strong performances. Strong performances lead to confident recording decisions. When those elements are right, the mix becomes a process of enhancement rather than damage control.

Paying for Names vs Paying for Investment

Many artists fixate on attaching a well known or award winning name to their record, assuming that prestige alone will elevate the outcome. In practice, a famous name mostly guarantees a higher invoice, not a deeper level of care.

Unless a producer or engineer has genuine creative and financial investment in the project, your record is simply one job among many. Backend points, such as a share of royalties or ownership, are not a substitute for a professional fee. They exist in addition to it, as an incentive. When someone stands to benefit from the long term success of the record, they are far more likely to fight for it, push it further, and make decisions that serve the song rather than the schedule.

This is not about cutting costs or asking people to work for free. It is about alignment. A producer with skin in the game treats the record differently, because its success matters beyond delivery day.

Instead of asking “Who worked on this?”, ask “Who is invested in this?”. That distinction often makes the difference between a competent record and a special one.

Sam is a Studio Owner at Mammoth Sound Studio, and Artist / Composer at Pick Up Goliath.

http://www.mammothsoundstudio.com/
https://www.pickupgoliath.com/



Angela's Artist Advice

Angela Marie Eidenmiller is the ISSA Associate Director of Artist Relations. Over the past few years many of our Award Winning Artists have benefited from Angela's sage advice.

New Year, Same Pressure: But You Don't Have to Carry It Alone

A new year doesn't magically erase the pressure independent musicians carry—it just resets the calendar and asks us to keep going.
The independent music world looks glamorous from the outside. Creative freedom. No gatekeepers. Your rules, your voice, your path. In reality, it's also a world where you're the artist, the manager, the marketer, the accountant, the booking agent, the content creator, the customer service department, and—on especially spicy days—the emotional support human for yourself.

Independent musicians are expected to be everything at once. You write and perform music, but you're also chasing algorithms you didn't invent, posting content you don't love, and analyzing engagement like it's a personality test. You spend hours crafting a heartfelt post only to watch a blurry video you posted accidentally outperform it by 400%. (The algorithm is a mysterious raccoon. We do not negotiate with it.)

The pressure never really shuts off. Even rest feels suspicious—like if you relax for one evening, the internet will forget you exist, your momentum will evaporate, and someone younger with better lighting will steal your audience while you're brushing your teeth.

Growth is public. Comparison is constant. And suddenly your self-worth is doing parkour based on numbers that change daily for reasons nobody fully understands.

When things slow down, many artists turn the pressure inward. I should be further along. Everyone else is winning. I must be doing something wrong. (They aren't winning. They're just posting highlights and crying privately like the rest of us.)

Over time, that internal narrative can quietly drain confidence, joy, and mental health—even when the love for music itself is still very much alive.

Industry research consistently shows that musicians experience higher-than-average levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Financial instability, isolation, unpredictable schedules, performance pressure, and the expectation to always be "on" all stack up. Add social media—where success is measured publicly, loudly, and with charts—and it's no wonder many independent artists feel overwhelmed or alone, even when surrounded by fans and peers.

What makes this especially tricky is that musicians are often taught to push through. Hustle harder. Stay grateful. Don't complain. Keep creating. Smile. But ignoring mental and emotional strain doesn't make it disappear—it just turns it into emotional debt with interest. And suffering quietly is not a prerequisite for being talented, professional, or "cut out for this."

Getting support isn't quitting. It's maintenance. Just like changing strings before they snap or resting your voice before it mutinies, mental health care is part of sustaining a long career.

The good news is the industry is finally starting to acknowledge this, and there are real, credible resources built specifically for musicians—people who understand irregular income, touring exhaustion, creative burnout, and why "just take a day off" is not the solution everyone thinks it is.

Your music matters.
But so do you—the human making it.
Preferably a human who's rested, supported, and still enjoys making music.

So we've named the pressure. Now what?

Start small. Talk to someone who understands this industry. Reach out before you're in crisis, not after. Schedule rest like it's part of your job—because it is. And remember that momentum doesn't disappear just because you paused to take care of yourself.

You don't need to fix everything this year. You don't need to "win" January. You just need to stay well enough to keep creating—and connected enough to remember you're not doing this alone.

This year isn't about grinding harder.
It's about lasting longer.

Until the next newsletter, go forth ISSA friends and continue to CONNECT authentically, CREATE fearlessly, and confidently keep CONTRIBUTING your music to the world.

The world needs your music now more than ever.

— Your ISSA Sis,
Angela Marie Eidenmiller
ISSAsongwriters.angela@gmail.com

Resources & Support for Independent Musicians

MusiCares
Mental health support, financial assistance, recovery programs, and emergency aid for music professionals
https://www.musicares.org/get-help

Backline
Therapy referrals, support groups, and wellness resources built specifically for the music industry
https://backline.care

SIMS Foundation
Mental health and substance-use support for musicians and their families
https://simsfoundation.org

Sweet Relief Musicians Fund
Financial assistance for musicians facing illness, disability, or crisis
https://www.sweetrelief.org

Music Health Alliance
Healthcare access, insurance navigation, and medical advocacy for music professionals
https://www.musichealthalliance.com

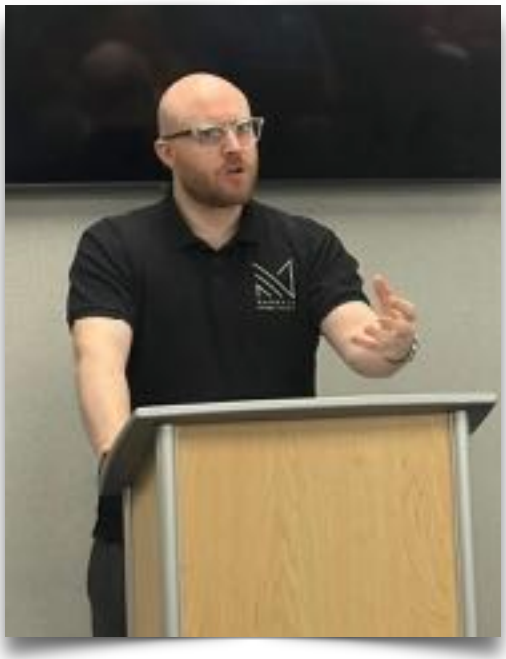
To Write Love on Her Arms
Crisis support and tools to find local mental health help worldwide
https://twloha.com/find-help

Immediate Crisis Support (U.S.)
Call or text 988 — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (24/7, free, confidential)
International Crisis Support
https://www.opencounseling.com/suicide-hotlines

We want to thank Dave Plekkenpol, of Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars for donating this beautiful Cigar Box Guitar for us to raffle off at the Summit!

Stogie Joe
Cigar Box Guitars
Handcrafted by David Plekkenpol
stogiejoeguitars.com





Breakout Sessions & Keynote Speakers

Part of what made the 2025 Summit such a big success was the breakout sessions and Keynote Speakers that provided our attendees with lots of useful information. Our objective for this year is to have you help us improve on what we accomplished last year.

In our October Newsletter, we asked for you to submit topics that you'd like to see addressed and then think about who would be a good candidate to speak on that topic (yes it can be yourself).

So far we've only received 4 topic suggestions and four speaker abstracts. We wanted to have our speakers signed up by now as many speakers book their engagements many months in advance. If you have a topic idea or a speaker in mind please email either Todd Apfel or Angela Marie Eidenmiller asap!

Odds-N-Ends



The ISSA Awards Show and Summit are all about you, the **"Artist"**! What started out as just a place to gather and network a couple of years ago and now turned into a major event that has garnered the attention of many industry heavyweights! This isn't because of us, but rather this is because of you, your ideas and your help! So be proud of what you've helped accomplish! But… yes here comes the but! For us to keep this growing and successful, we truly need your help! If you've read the whole newsletter before arriving here, you've probably noticed quite a few times we are asking for your help!

All I ask is, when you read we need help, please don't think someone else will just take care of this. If you can help in any way (planning, organizing, getting sponsors, volunteering) we would love to hear from you. If you have ideas, we want to hear from you! Remember, there is no such thing as a bad idea, as ideas are what created both the ISSA and the ISSA Summit! - Thanks Todd!

Stay tuned for **BIG ANNOUNCEMENTS** in our February Newsletter!

This Newsletter is edited by Todd Apfel (issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com) & Angela Marie Eidenmiller (issasongwriters.angela@gmail.com) Feel free to reach out to either of us with your comments or suggestions.