

Are You Excited Yet?

We're Under 3 Months Away… Have You Done These 5 Things?

Are you excited yet? In just over two months, we'll be gathering in Atlanta for three fun-filled days of celebration, networking, and learning at the **8th Annual ISSA Awards Show and Summit** (August 20–22)!

Since January, you've been busy with everything from nominations to rallying your fan base to vote every single day in April. You crushed it. And now? The finalists are set. So that means we're down to the easy stuff… right?

Not so fast.

If you're planning to **attend in person**, there are still a few things to check off your list. Do them now, and your trip to Atlanta will be smoother, less stressful, and way more rewarding. Here's what's left:

1. Send Us Your Walk-Up Song

ISSA AWARDS FINALISTS – this one's for YOU.

As you prepare for your potential moment on stage, we want your entrance to be unforgettable. Please send a **30-second MP3 audio clip** of your nominated song – or the song you'd love playing as you walk up to accept your award.

Send to: **ISSAawards@yahoo.com**

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I really tried to make this newsletter shorter, but every time I thought that I was done, another news item or idea jumped into my head.

Having said that, We already have some great articles lined up for next month…

* How to get booked at CMA Fest and is it worth it?
* The difference between Music, Music Business and the Music Industry
* HUGE NEWS About an opportunity you won't want to miss at this year's Summit!

2. Purchase Your Awards Show Ticket (Seriously, Don't Wait)

Have you purchased your Awards Show tickets? If not… why not?

Over the past few months, we've shared article after article and testimonial after testimonial showing what it means to attend in person: networking with fellow artists, judges, and industry pros; collaborating on new music; and learning the business at our Summit.

But here's the blunt truth: **next year's judges will be attending *this* year's show.** How will they know who you are, recognize your face, or connect your name to your music if you're not in the room?

Don't be the best-kept secret. Get your ticket here:

https://issasongwriters.com/tickets/

3. Book Your Travel – Like, Right Now

Whether you're driving, flying, or hitching a ride, this is one of the most overlooked – and easiest – things to put off. Don't.

If you're flying, note that **Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson is the world's busiest airport** – over 290,000 passengers and nearly 2,000 flights *per day*. Yes, that means lots of options. It also means flights book up fast.

Book your favorite arrival and departure flights now, before they fill up.

4. Reserve Your Hotel Room (Especially Our Host Hotel)

There are plenty of hotels near the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, but one is our official **Host Hotel: the Courtyard by Marriott**.

We have a special article further in this newsletter explaining how to get your discounted rate. But here's the heads-up: **we only have a limited number of these discounted rooms.** Just like with flights, they'll go fast.

Make that reservation.

5. Register for the FREE Summit (and Score a Cooler Bag & Beverage Tumbler!)

The ISSA Summit is **FREE to attend** – and this year, you can register ahead of time. We're expecting our biggest turnout yet, so don't assume there will be space at the door.

To register: Email Todd Apfel at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** with how many people are in your party and their names.

VERY IMPORTANT: Only the first **100 people to register** are guaranteed a **T-Mobile Thermal Cooler Bag and a Beverage Tumbler**. These are legit – don't miss out.

One More Thing… Grab Your 2026 Commemorative Gear

Don't leave Atlanta without a piece of history. Visit the ISSA Store to snag your **2026 Commemorative Awards Show & Summit memorabilia** – from T-shirts to keepsakes you'll treasure for years.

🔗 **https://issasongwriters.com/store/**



ISSA Awards 2026 Tee Shirt



2026 ISSA Summit Tee Shirt



Embroidered 2026 Summit Cap

From the Classroom to Music City: An Exclusive Spotlight on John Pineiro

Nashville, Tennessee — a city built on storytelling, steel guitar riffs, and the dreams of singers and songwriters from every corner of the globe. It's a place where careers are made, legends are recorded, and creativity is king. And for the last two decades, engineer & producer **John Pineiro** has been a quiet force behind the console, helping artists capture their authentic sound at his studio, **Perfect Image Recording**.

As the **2026 ISSA Summit** approaches, we are honored to feature John as one of our featured speakers. Here's a look at his remarkable journey from a high-school music teacher to one of Nashville's most trusted recording professionals.



🎸 A Foundation in Music & Education

John Pineiro's path to Nashville wasn't a straight line — it was built on decades of dedication. An 80s guitarist at heart, John holds degrees in **Music Education** and **Jazz Performance**, as well as a **Master's degree in Jazz Performance (Guitar)**.

In the mid-1990s, while working as a **high-school music teacher**, he began learning the **Pro Tools** recording format. That technical skill, combined with his deep musical knowledge, set the stage for a second career. He built his first studio on **Long Island, New York**, before making the pivotal decision in 2004 to relocate to **Nashville, Tennessee** — the epicenter of Country, Americana, and contemporary Christian music.

"I've managed to take all of the negativity in stride, and where it was coming from and build myself from that."
— John Pineiro

Perfect Image Recording: Where Nashville's Sound Comes to Life

Once in Nashville, John established **Perfect Image Recording** — a beautiful, creative room designed specifically for **singer-songwriters**. The studio offers:

- **Great rates and a creative atmosphere.**
- Space to bring your **full band**.
- Access to **Nashville's finest session players** for out-of-town clients.
- **Remote recording capabilities** — artists can record with top Nashville musicians from anywhere in the world.

Whether you are an indie artist cutting a demo or a touring act looking to capture a polished performance, Perfect Image Recording provides the tools, talent, and vibe to bring your vision to life.

Embracing Heritage & Overcoming Obstacles

John is **proud of his Hispanic roots** — both of his parents are of Puerto Rican descent. He has been open about the unique obstacles he has faced as a Hispanic professional in the music industry.

“Being Hispanic has come with its own whole set of obstacles. … I’m proud of who I am and my Hispanic roots.”
His story is an inspiring reminder that success in Music City is about talent, resilience, and never losing sight of your identity.

John Pineiro at the 2026 ISSA Summit

We are thrilled to announce that **John Pineiro** will be a featured speaker at the **2026 ISSA Summit** in **Atlanta**!

📅 **Date:** Thursday, August 20th, 2026

📍 **Event:** ISSA Summit – Atlanta, GA

🎤 **Slot:** Immediately following **Tamanie’s** welcoming remarks to attendees

John will share insights from his decades of experience — from the classroom to the studio — and offer practical advice for singer-songwriters on how to get the most out of a recording session, work with Nashville’s top session players, and build a sustainable career.

Don’t miss this opportunity to learn from a true Nashville insider who has sat behind the glass with some of the finest musicians in Music City. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the words “Music City” to receive a free “Summit Raffle Coupon”.*

📖 More Information

- **Studio:** Perfect Image Recording (Nashville, TN)
- **Contact Email:** perfectimagerecording@gmail.com
- **Full Interview:** NashvilleVoyager Feature

We look forward to seeing you at the 2026 ISSA Summit and welcoming John Pineiro to the stage. Come ready to listen, learn, and be inspired.

A Deep Dive Into The Best and Worst Streaming Platforms for Indie Artists

** A Strategic Guide for ISSA Members **



We've spent the past month doing deep dive research on streaming platforms. Although this is a bit lengthy, it's a must read for anyone who streams or plans to stream their music. This report is your up-to-date playbook.

The landscape for independent artists has fundamentally shifted. Two distinct camps have emerged: the dominant mainstream platforms where earning a living remains incredibly difficult, and a dynamic new wave of ethical, artist-first alternatives designed to fix those very problems. The past month alone has brought major changes—from Spotify's new royalty barrier to the public launch of a cooperative-owned alternative.

The Critical Headlines You Need to Know

- **Spotify's 1,000-Stream Rule Is Now Enforced.** Tracks must hit 1,000 streams within 12 months to earn anything. Zero royalties below that threshold.
- **Spotify Sunsetting Its Basic Subscription.** This could further reduce mechanical royalties for songwriters.
- **AI Transparency Is Now Mandatory Across Most Platforms.** DistroKid, Apple Music, and others now require AI disclosure.
- **Tidal's Direct Upload Generates $0 in Streaming Royalties.** Income is only possible via editorial "Spotlight" awards.
- **TikTok Pivots to View-Based Payouts.** Viral moments may finally generate revenue.
- **Subvert Has Launched Publicly.** A cooperative, 0-fee marketplace with over 20,000 artist members.
- **Bandcamp Fridays Have Returned for 2026.** Eight scheduled zero-fee days, starting with $3.6 million raised in February alone.
- **SoundCloud Doubles Down on Fan-Powered Royalties.** 100% of royalties now go to artists, with a new "follower exclusive" feature.

💎 The Best Streaming Platforms for Indie Artists

Highest Payouts & Fair Economics

Tidal remains the fair-pay leader, paying 0.010–**0.013 per stream**—roughly triple the industry average. Its new **direct upload feature** allows indie artists to bypass distributors, though uploaded tracks earn 0 *in streaming royalties and are instead eligible for a* ∗∗1,000 "Spotlight" award** if selected for editorial playlists. More promising is Tidal's **direct-to-fan sales** feature, where artists keep **90%** of download revenue—a direct Bandcamp competitor.

Apple Music delivers a steady 0.007–**0.010 per stream**, with most indies landing around $0.008. Its **no free tier** means every listener pays, and its human curators offer prestige that algorithms can't match. Apple has also rolled out **AI transparency tags**, prioritizing human-made music in its playlists.

Amazon Music remains a dependable mid-range earner at 0.004–**0.008 per stream**, though its lack of indie-specific features keeps it a secondary consideration.

Qobuz (high-fidelity audio) has quietly emerged with the highest per-stream rate at **$0.01873**, though its user base remains niche.

Direct-to-Fan Models: The Gold Standard

Bandcamp remains the undisputed champion. Artists keep an average of **82%** of revenue, a figure that jumps to **100%** on Bandcamp Fridays. In 2026, **eight Bandcamp Fridays** have been confirmed, starting with a February event that raised $3.6 *million for independent artists. Total payouts to artists through Bandcamp have now reached $***1.72 billion**. Bandcamp has also banned AI-generated music, reinforcing its artist-first stance.

Indie Rooftop offers an incredible **90% net revenue share** based on viewership. It functions as a streaming platform and original docu-series, showcasing indie musicians through rooftop performances and interviews. Its shoppable video ads allow direct merch sales, and it offers fan retargeting via email and text—a powerful combo of storytelling and revenue.

Discovery & Community Engines

SoundCloud is now more equitable than ever. Its **Fan-Powered Royalties (FPR)** model ensures that a fan's subscription money goes only to the artists they actually listen to, rather than a top-heavy pool. In January 2026, SoundCloud increased artist royalties to **100%**, up from 80%. Independent artists using the FPR model have seen a **35% revenue increase**. The platform also launched **Follower Exclusive Releases**, allowing artists to drop music only to their followers—a powerful superfan tool.

Audiomack remains a global powerhouse for hip-hop, Afrobeats, and EDM, particularly strong in developing markets.

Emerging Ethical & Decentralized Platforms

Vocana (indie-only, user-centric payment model) is building momentum with a planned 2026 public launch. **Audius** offers near-instant crypto payouts and automated royalty splits.

⚠️ The Worst Streaming Platforms for Indie Artists

Major Platforms With Unfair Economics

Spotify remains the most criticized, with a per-stream payout of just 0.003–**0.005**.
Its **1,000-stream minimum within a 12-month period** has had a devastating impact on emerging artists: tracks below that threshold earn **zero**. One report notes that **88% of tracks on Spotify generated no revenue** in the past year. Spotify has also faced backlash for unilaterally adding audiobooks to subscriptions to qualify for lower mechanical royalty rates for songwriters.

YouTube continues to be called "by far the worst offender" for fair pay, with standard payouts of just 0.0007–0.002 per stream.

Platforms With Complex or Opaque Models

TikTok remains a powerful discovery engine, but its complex licensing deals and struggles to ensure fair compensation for songwriters persist. The platform is now shifting to a **view-based payout model**, which could turn viral moments into actual revenue—but early results are unclear.

🚨 The Distribution Question (Briefly)

While we'll cover distribution platforms in depth next month, here's the bottom line: the relationship between streaming platforms and distributors has become equally complex. **DistroKid** now requires AI disclosure upon upload and charges hidden fees for "legacy" takedowns. **CD Baby** launched "Stages Selects," a development program with marketing and financial support for 10 artists. **TuneCore** announced a royalty advance program. The key takeaway: choose your distributor as carefully as your streaming platforms.

🔍 Deep Dive: Why Subvert Deserves Your Attention

Is Subvert is something ISSA members should be looking into? The short answer: **yes, emphatically**. Subvert is not just another platform; it's a structural alternative to the entire corporate model.

What Is Subvert?

Subvert is a **cooperatively owned**, community-governed marketplace built as a direct response to Bandcamp's corporate acquisitions. It's structured to prevent "enshittification"—the process where platforms degrade once investors demand returns.



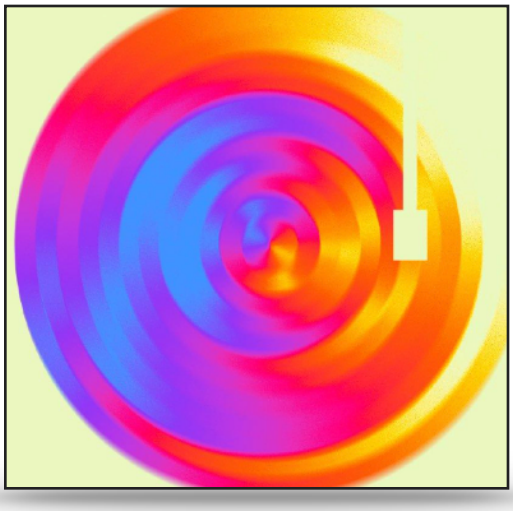
Subvert - Core Facts (As of May 2026)

- **Public launch occurred in May 2026**, with over **20,000 co-op members** at launch.
- **February 2026** saw all artist-members able to create pages and upload releases.
- **April 2026** exceeded 20,000 members; **May 2026** marked the public opening.
- **100% of founding ownership** is reserved for the community—artists, labels, and workers.
- **0% platform fees**: When a fan buys music, the full purchase price goes to the artist.
- *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word "Subvert" for a free Summit Raffle Ticket.*
- **AI-generated content is explicitly banned** from the platform.
- **One member, one vote**—no single corporate entity can force a sale.
- Notable label members include **Warp Records** and **Polyvinyl Record Co.** .

Why It Matters for ISSA Members

Subvert isn't trying to replace Spotify—it's solving a different problem: **ownership and control**. For songwriters who want to sell music directly to fans without losing a percentage to platform fees, who want a say in how the platform evolves, and who want to ensure their work isn't used to train AI models without consent, Subvert is arguably the most important platform launch in years.

A New Era for ISSA



At the 2025 ISSA Awards, a landmark announcement was made: ISSA is now officially recognized as a **Registered Media Company** with the Recording Academy/ GRAMMYs®. This prestigious status is a powerful tool for our community, as it means **ISSA can now submit eligible entries on behalf of our Gold Level Winners directly to the GRAMMYs®**.

Your Path to GRAMMY® Consideration

So, how can you, as an independent artist, get your music in front of GRAMMY voters? Whether you're an ISSA member aiming for gold or an artist with a standout release, the key is to understand and adhere to the Recording Academy's strict guidelines. For the 69th GRAMMY® Awards (presented in 2027), the eligibility period runs from **August 31, 2025, through August 28, 2026**.

Before you even think about submitting, you must ensure that every detail is accurate, as metadata and credits are meticulously checked.

Here is a checklist of what you need to have ready:

- 🎵 **Officially released music**: Must be commercially available via streaming, digital download, or physical retail.
- 📋 **Complete credits**: For all songwriters, producers, engineers, mixers, mastering engineers, and featured artists.
- 🔑 **ISRC & UPC codes**: For every song and album/single.
- 🎨 **Album artwork**: High-resolution images.
- 🎤 **Lyrics**: Highly recommended for many categories.
- 📂 **Release dates**: All titles must be submitted with their original release date.

Independent artists cannot submit their music through a public, open-submission form. Instead, entries must come from an eligible Recording Academy member or a registered media company—like ISSA. While the Online Entry Process period is held in the summer (for the 2026 GRAMMYs®, it ran from July 16 to August 29, 2025), the real work begins now.

Plan Your Work. Work Your Plan.

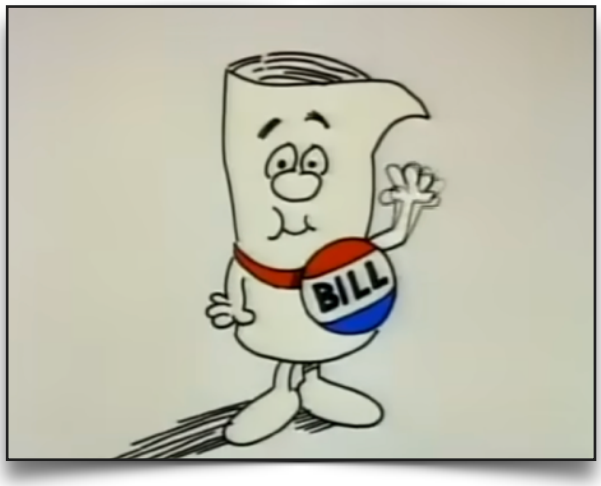
For 2026, the Gold Level Winners of the ISSA Awards may be eligible for GRAMMY® submission through ISSA. If you're considering this path, start preparing your materials immediately. Ensure your release fits within the eligibility window, and that all your metadata, credits, and visual assets are flawless. The deadline may feel far away, but a well-prepared submission is a competitive one.

For official rules and guidelines, always refer to the **Recording Academy**. You can find detailed information on their website:

- **Rules & Guidelines**: https://www.recordingacademy.com/awards/rules-guidelines
- **Media Company Registration & OEP**: https://www.recordingacademy.com/awards/media-company-registration-and-online-entry-process-oep
- **GRAMMY Submission Guide**: https://www.grammy.com/news/2026-grammys-how-to-submit-music-guide

Here's to your success—and to seeing ISSA artists on the GRAMMY® ballot.

YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: THE QUIET SUMMER BEFORE THE STORM?



Over the past three months, we have watched two monumental bills—the American Music Fairness Act and the Living Wage for Musicians Act—linger in the shadows of Washington. We've reported on hearings, city council resolutions, and the growing fight against AI. Each article has carried the same urgent message: your livelihood is being decided in committee rooms you've never seen.

This month, there is no breaking news from the House floor. No dramatic markups, no surprise hearings. And that silence is the most dangerous update of all.

While Congress has been consumed with other headline-grabbing battles, our issues have quietly slipped back under the rug. The AMFA's markup remains unscheduled. The LWMA's penny-per-stream proposal is stalled. And the AI bills—the NO FAKES Act, the TRAIN Act, the CLEAR Act—are moving at a glacial pace, even as deepfakes of artists flood the internet.

The truth? If we don't make noise, nobody will make noise for us.

But here's the good news: **some of you have already started.**

A Small but Mighty Roster of Action

I asked you to email me with what you've done to advocate for fair pay in the past two months. I did receive responses—not the flood I had hoped for, but a powerful, determined trickle.

- One member called their representative's office and actually got a call back from a staffer who asked for more information on the AMFA.
- Another shared that they brought up fair pay at a town hall, and the congressman admitted he "wasn't familiar" with the legislation—then promised to look into it.
- A handful of ISSA State Reps reached out to their local members to organize calls, and several musicians sent personal emails to their representatives, attaching links to both the AMFA and LWMA.

These are not small things. **Every single one of those actions planted a seed.** But to grow a forest, we need more seeds.

Where Things Stand This Month

- **AMFA**: Still awaiting a markup in the House Judiciary Committee. The radio industry continues to lobby hard against it.
- **LWMA**: No federal movement, but city resolutions in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Detroit continue to build grassroots pressure.
- **AI Legislation**: The NO FAKES Act was reintroduced in May with bipartisan support, but has not yet advanced. The TRAIN Act and CLEAR Act remain in committee.
- **Protect Working Musicians Act**: Reintroduced in May, allowing indie artists to collectively negotiate with streaming platforms and AI companies—a potential game-changer that deserves your attention.

Your Turn – Time to Break the Silence

Here's what I'd like from every ISSA member reading this: **take ONE action this week.**

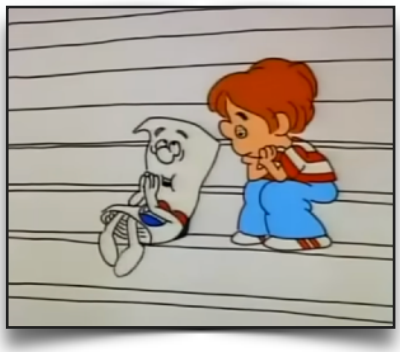
- Call your U.S. Representative. Say: *"I am a musician and a voter in your district. I want you to cosponsor and push for a vote on the American Music Fairness Act and the Living Wage for Musicians Act."*
- Email your Senator. Ask them to support the NO FAKES Act and the TRAIN Act.
- Post on social media using **#ISSAFairPay** and tag your representatives.
- Talk to another musician. Explain why these bills matter. Build the circle.

Then, **email me at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** and tell me what you did. I will read every single message. And in next month's newsletter, I will publish how we are doing. For those who took action, you will receive a free 2026 ISSA Summit Raffle Ticket— to celebrate the ones who refused to stay silent.

The Bottom Line

We are in the quiet season in Washington. But quiet does not mean nothing is happening. It means the powerful are counting on us to look away. Let's prove them wrong.

Your voice is an instrument. It's time to play it loud.



Get Ready to Be Inspired! Our 2026 Summit Breakout Sessions Are Here!

This month we continue spotlighting our presenters, with a brief breakdown of their presentations for the 2026 ISSA Summit Breakout Sessions.

The Unspoken Truth: Turning Adversity into Your Greatest Asset

Session Details:
Who: Miranda Raine
What: *Adversity in the Music Industry: Disabilities, Resilience, and Overcoming the Odds*
When: Thursday, August 20, 2026 @ **2:15 PM**
Where: Courtyard by Marriott – Atlanta, GA (ISSA Summit)



Let's be honest for a moment. The music industry loves a "overnight success" story. But you and I know the truth: Most of us aren't overnight successes. We are survivors.

We have shown up to gigs in pain. We have been told we are "too old," "too different," or "too difficult." We have watched our bank accounts dwindle while our passion burned bright. And yet, we are still here.

That is why **Thursday, August 20 at 2:15 PM** is a appointment you cannot miss. During the 2026 ISSA Summit at the Courtyard by Marriott in Atlanta, speaker **Miranda Raine** will take the stage to deliver a raw, necessary, and ultimately hopeful session on a topic that affects every single person in the room: **Adversity in the Music Industry.**

Miranda isn't just going to tell you to "keep your chin up." She is bringing the receipts. In her exclusive session, she will dive deep into the specific types of adversity that are currently silencing great artists:

- **Disabilities & Chronic Illness:** How to build a sustainable career when your body has other plans.
- **Mental Health:** Breaking the stigma that keeps us suffering in silence.
- **Performance Injuries:** The physical toll of our passion and how to heal.
- **Financial Instability:** The silent killer of creativity.

The "Why" Behind the Struggle

Why does this matter? Because Miranda understands that adversity isn't just a roadblock—it is raw material.

During her talk, she will reveal **hard statistics** about what musicians actually face behind the scenes. You will hear **direct quotes** from industry professionals (the good, the bad, and the ugly) regarding race, religion, gender, and age discrimination.

But here is the twist: Miranda won't leave you in the dark. She will show you exactly how to weaponize that pain for your career.

How Resilience Boosts Your Brand

This session is designed to help you stop *surviving* and start *thriving*. You will learn how to use adversity to:

- **Supercharge your songwriting:** Authenticity cuts through every bad playlist.
- **Build unshakable rapport with fans:** Your tribe needs to know they aren't alone.
- **Create unique branding:** No one can copy your story.
- **Fix broken systems:** Learn to see the industry’s cracks as opportunities for change.

Don't Hide, Harmonize

Too often, we are told to hide our scars in the music business. Miranda Raine is here to tell you that those scars are your set list.

If you have ever felt like an outsider, if you have ever been told "no" because of who you are, or if you are simply tired of pretending everything is fine—**be in that room on Thursday at 2:15 PM.**

Come hear the quotes. See the statistics. Leave with a plan to turn your toughest battle into your most authentic brand.

Today I'm Great: Riding the Highs and Lows of the Creative Process

Session Details:
Who: Randie O'Neal & Emo LeBlanc
What: *"Riding the Highs and Lows of the Creative Process"*
When: Friday, August 21, 2026 @ **10:15 AM**
Where: Courtyard by Marriott – Atlanta, GA (ISSA Summit)



Every songwriter knows the feeling. One moment, the words are pouring out like magic, every rhyme lands perfectly, and the hook feels inevitable. The next moment? Blank page. Racing thoughts. That quiet, familiar voice whispering, *"This isn't good enough. It's all been done before."*

The creative process is rarely a straight line. It's a winding road of brilliant highs and crushing lows. But what if those lows weren't a sign of failure—but simply your brain doing exactly what it's wired to do?



That's the question at the heart of **"Today I'm Great: Working Through the Highs and Lows of the Creative Process,"** a powerful 45-minute speaking session at this year's ISSA Songwriter Summit. Led by **Randie O'Neal, PhD** and **Emo LeBlanc**, this workshop isn't your typical "write every day" pep talk. It's a brain-based, science-backed, and deeply practical guide to understanding *why* creativity feels so unpredictable—and what you can actually do about it.

Your Brain on Songwriting

Randie O'Neal brings a rare combination to the stage: she's an award-winning singer-songwriter *and* a psychologist with a PhD and clinical training. Emo LeBlanc matches her with an equally unique resume: an internationally touring artist, ISSA's 2022 Male Vocalist of the Year and 2023 Emerging Artist of the Year—and a B.Sc. in Neuro-Psychology. Together, they bridge the gap between the science of the mind and the soul of songwriting.

In this session, they'll give you a simple tour of the "creative brain." You'll learn about the **prefrontal cortex** (your creative conductor) and the **limbic system** (your emotional amplifier)—and how these two parts of your brain either set you up for flow or shut you down completely.

When Anxiety Hijacks the Hook

Have you ever sat down to write and felt fine one minute, only to be overwhelmed by self-doubt or paralysis the next? That's what Randie and Emo call an **"amygdala hijack"** —the moment your brain's fear center takes over and your creative thinking goes offline.

The good news? You don't have to "just push through it." (In fact, they'll explain why that usually makes things worse.) Instead, you'll leave this session with simple, portable tools to calm your nervous system—grounding exercises, breathing patterns, and body-based resets you can use backstage, at your writing desk, or even in the middle of a co-write.

What You'll Walk Away With

This isn't a lecture. It's an interactive workshop designed for real songwriters with real struggles. You'll experience:

- A brief guided free-writing exercise to practice accessing ideas without judgment
- A live "reset" practice to calm creative anxiety in the moment
- A simple four-step framework: **Notice, Name, Nurture, Nudge**
- One personal trigger and one calming tool you can commit to trying over the next month

By the end of the hour, you won't have a degree in psychology. But you *will* have a more compassionate, realistic view of your own creative process—and practical ways to ride the highs *and* the lows with more consistency, bravery, and even joy.

Meet Your Facilitators

Emo LeBlanc brings the heat of his Louisiana roots and the soul of Laurel Canyon to every stage. With over 75 singles, international touring across the US, Canada, and Europe, and appearances on *TMZ Live* and *America's Got Talent*, Emo knows what it means to perform under pressure. But his B.Sc. in Neuro-Psychology gives him a unique window into *why* artists struggle—and how to break free.

Randie O'Neal is an award-winning singer-songwriter, a Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LCADC), and holds a PhD in Psychology. Her work with adolescents and her deep understanding of healing and resilience infuse both her counseling and her songwriting. She's dedicated to lifting up indie artists and helping them find their voice—without burning out or shutting down.

Don't Miss This Session

If you've ever felt like the only songwriter who battles anxiety, self-doubt, or creative blocks, come to this room and hear the truth: you're not broken. You're just human. And with the right tools, you can work *with* your brain instead of fighting it.

Join Randie O'Neal and Emo LeBlanc on Friday, August 22nd at 10:15 AM in the Courtyard by Marriott. Come for the science. Stay for the songs. Leave with your creative spark reignited.

Because today—and every day—you get to decide: "Today, I'm great."





The ISSA Summit is **FREE to attend** – and this year, you can register ahead of time. We're expecting our biggest turnout yet, so don't assume there will be space at the door.

To register: Email Todd Apfel at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** with how many people are in your party and their names.

VERY IMPORTANT: Only the first **100 people to register** are guaranteed a **T-Mobile Thermal Cooler Bag and a Beverage Tumbler**. These are legit – don't miss out.

Why You Need to Be in Atlanta (More Testimonials)!



Whether you're a finalist or not, the 2026 ISSA Awards Show & Summit is where your next big step happens.

Think of it as a springboard into next year's awards. More importantly, think of it as fuel for *right now*. The best thing you can do for your career, your network, and your future chances isn't waiting until next April—it's waiting for you **August 20–22 in Atlanta**.

Here's what you'll find:

- **Fellow artists** on the same road, ready to connect
- **Past ISSA winners** who know what works
- **Industry pros and PR specialists** to help you get heard, seen, and booked
- **Summit seminars** to build your career from the ground up
- **A special session with this year's judges** – they'll openly discuss what they look for and answer your questions. No more guessing.

And here's something important: next year's judges will be attending this year's show. How will they know your face or connect your name to your music if you're not in the room? Don't wait. Be there.

Still not sure? Here's what two artists who read last month's newsletter had to say:

Christine Clifford

For those considering whether to attend ISSA:
I have been to this great event the past 2 years and unfortunately my situation doesn't allow for me to attend this year. My experience has been amazing. Meeting wonderful musicians and making new friendships, collaborating and learning.
- Continued -



Christine Clifford - continued:

If you haven't already, please consider joining, observe via social media, interact, share your music, come to The Summit in August if you'd like to learn/network, get friends/fans involved, collaborate with others and take a leap by joining us at The Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, in Atlanta this August, meet your peers in person, get to know many like-minded musicians, who will support you, help you achieve your goals.

Set some goals, and reach for your success. We want you to succeed, there's loads of knowledgeable peers here that are willing, tap into the friendships, the knowledge, and soar!!!

Cherelle Jardine

Last year I joined the ISSA family, and my band Stone Poets was nominated for International Band of the Year and Video of the Year for our song *Beauty of It All*.

We were thrilled to make it to the judges' round, and I decided to attend the awards show to represent us.

I originally planned to fly in on Friday night, but when I discovered the Summit and all the incredible panels, I changed my flight and arrived Wednesday to take in the full experience and what an experience it was!
I found myself surrounded with artists, stories, and moments that felt like we were quietly shaping something bigger for all of us.
- Continued -



Cherelle Jardine - Continued:

Music lived everywhere, in conversations, in late-night courtyard sing-alongs, in every shared dream.

I was deeply honored when we received Gold for International Band of the Year and Silver for *Beauty of It All*. But that night was about so much more than awards, it was a room filled with support, generosity, and love.

International Singer Songwriters Association Awards Show & Summit is a community of creatives from all over the world. A place where artists rise together, where connections become friendships, and where inspiration lingers long after the final award is handed out. From the red carpet, the interviews, the panels, the late night jams, to the pre party, after party, and artist showcases, it's something you truly should experience, I'm so glad I did.
It was so wonderful to meet Tamanie Dove. She's a talented artist, and an inspiration to all of us. Thank you Tamanie for all you do!

I can't wait to return to Atlanta this year to reconnect, to learn, to celebrate, and to be part of this shared musical journey with old and new friends.

See you in Atlanta, my friends.
Much love,
Cherelle Jardine
www.cherellejardine.ca



The Rick Spins Show is hosted by legendary radio personality **Rick Landstrom**. This show is *only* on ISSA Radio, and it's a very special opportunity. Rick brings two live shows every week:

- **Monday at 8pm Eastern** – *Fun In The Front Show* – "Making Mondays Great Again"
- **Thursday at 8pm Eastern** – *Rick Spins Top 15 Show* – featuring the **top 15 songs from ISSA artists**

How to submit to The Rick Spins Show:
Send your music to **issaradio.rick@gmail.com**
*Again, please properly **meta-tag** your files. It makes Rick's job easier*



From the Listeners of The Rick Spins Radio Show

The Price of Airplay: Why Pay-to-Play Radio is Stealing Your Future

June's "Question of The Month": What are your thoughts on radio stations charging you to play your music?

So you just finished mixing that single. You're proud of it. You find an "internet radio station" that claims to support independent artists. You submit your track. You wait. Then the email arrives. It isn't a congratulations. It isn't a playlist slot. It's an invoice. "For a nominal fee, we will add you to our rotation." Stop right there. Delete the email. Close the tab. **Walk away.**

As members of the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA), you need to hear the hard truth: **If a station charges you to play your song, they are not a radio station. They are a toll booth.**

And driving through that toll booth is destroying your career and devaluing the entire industry.

The "Red Flag" Rate Card

Let's look at what these unscrupulous operators are actually selling. These are real examples from current "Pay-to-Play" schemes:

- **Global "Radio" Distribution:** $175 *for*10,000+ *stations* (*with* "*PriorityReports*" *for an extra $*20/month)
- **Sync Licensing Contact List:** $120
- **Spotify Playlisting:** $135

Here is what they don't tell you: **They won't even listen to your song unless you pay.**

A legitimate radio station—terrestrial or internet—gets paid because they have listeners. They need great music to keep those listeners. The relationship should be symbiotic. With Pay-to-Play, the relationship is parasitic. You become the customer, not the artist.

The Math Doesn't Lie: You Are Losing 1000%

Most of these stations have microscopic listener bases. Let's do the math on your Return on Investment (ROI).

In the advertising world, when you spend money, you expect a return. Industry standards are brutal but clear:

- **Break-even:** You need to earn $2 *back for every $*1 spent (2:1 ROI).
- **Good:** $5 *back for every $*1 spent (5:1 ROI).
- **Exceptional:** $10 *back for every $*1 spent (10:1 ROI).

Now, ask yourself: *Will that* $150 "Premier Package" bring me $300 in ticket sales, merch, or streaming royalties?

Absolutely not.

In fact, you will likely lose money. Most of these stations don't report to SoundScan or royalty agencies. Even if they did, streaming payouts are fractions of a penny. You will pay them **1,000 times more** for the "privilege" of airplay than they will ever pay you in royalties.

The Hidden Damage to the Industry

Pay-to-Play doesn't just hurt your wallet; it floods the market with noise.

When money replaces merit, the quality of music dies. Real radio programmers (the good ones we vet at ISSA) spend hours looking for the next great songwriter. Pay-to-Play stations don't care if you are the next Bob Dylan or if you recorded your song on a potato. They only care if your credit card clears. *Send an email with the words "Pay to Play" to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com and you'll receive a free Summit Raffle Ticket.*

This creates a race to the bottom. Why would a station build a loyal audience with great music when they can just charge 500 desperate bands $175 each?

The ISSA Solution: Vetted Airplay

You work too hard on your craft to pay someone to ignore you.

The International Singer Songwriters Association maintains a **database of vetted, legitimate stations** on our website (issasongwriters.com). These are outlets that want good music because their *listeners* demand it.

Your Action Plan:

1. **Treat your submission fees like ad spend.** Ask: *What is my ROI?* If they can't guarantee $2 *back for every $*1 you spend, do not sign.
2. **Look for the Red Flag.** Anyone asking for money *before* agreeing to play your song is a predator.
3. **Use the ISSA Database.** Stick to the partners we have already verified for you.

The Bottom Line: Radio is a promotion tool. You should not pay for promotion that doesn't pay you back. Be smart. Be skeptical. And never, ever pay for airplay.

Keep writing. Keep singing. Keep your money in your pocket.

The Rick Spins Show News



The First Month of Season 4 Battle of the #1's In In The Books

We started off this thrilling completion at the beginning of May with 21 outstanding artists who have each claimed the #1 spot on ***The Rick Spins Thursday Night Top 15 Show***. When the month ended, we were down to 15 artists, still battling to be crowned the Season 4 Champion.

Tune in to **ISSA Radio** at 8pm eastern time on Thursday nights, as these talented musicians battle it out over the coming weeks to determine who will be crowned the Season 4 Champion.

https://issasongwriters.com/issa-radio/



The Summit Artist Spotlight for June - Samantha Grimes

There are artists who chase the spotlight, and then there are artists who simply shine. This month, we are thrilled to shine that light on Samantha Grimes, a woman whose humility is matched only by her immense talent.

Samantha Grimes – A Maverick Spirit, An Americana Voice

An ISSA Gold Entertainer of the Year, a Josie Music Award winner, and a newly crowned Maverick of the Year, Samantha remains refreshingly shy about her success. But her story is too powerful not to share, so let's pull back the curtain on one of the most compelling voices in Americana today.

From Minnesota Roots to a Global Sound

Samantha Grimes was born and raised in Minnesota, where music wasn't just a hobby—it was the family business. Her father was a radio DJ, and he would often bring home promotional records from the station, spinning them late into the night. That early exposure to a world of sound is likely what inspired a five-year-old Samantha to ask Santa for a guitar, setting the stage for a lifelong love affair with music.



By 2006, she had released her debut EP, immediately turning heads with her ability to weave seamlessly between genres. For a quarter of a century, Samantha has been performing her all-original music, crafting a signature style that is entirely her own—a happy accident born from playing her guitar left-handed and upside down.

A Golden Win

While Samantha may be modest, the industry is taking loud notice. In 2024, she brought home the ultimate prize from our very own ISSA organization: **ISSA Gold Entertainer of the Year** at the awards show in Atlanta. "I have a longing to win another ISSA. But who doesn't?" she laughs, proving that even champions are hungry for more.

Her reach continues to expand, recently earning her a spot as an inductee into the **Midwest All Music Hall of Fame** and the title of **Midwest Country Music Organization's Maverick of the Year** for 2025.

The Sound of "Stripped"

Samantha's latest project, *Stripped*, is currently making waves as a **GRAMMY® Considered album in 2025**. True to its name, the album lays her songwriting bare, allowing her mesmerizing voice to carry the weight of her storytelling.

If you love the emotional resonance of Britrock band Travis (specifically frontman Fran Healy, her biggest influence), you will find a soulmate in Grimes' music. Her catalog also draws natural comparisons to the fiery vulnerability of Alanis Morissette, the rustic honesty of the Avett Brothers, and the ethereal power of Florence + The Machine.

What's Next for the Maverick?



With 25 years of touring under her belt, including opening for heavy hitters like Eli Young Band and Charlie Parr, Samantha isn't slowing down. She has her sights set on a very specific Nashville dream: "I have the goal of performing at the Bluebird Cafe. I'd like to knock that one out within the next five years".

She continues to write, perform, and push the boundaries of her artistry. New music is always on the horizon for this Minnesota native, and we at ISSA are honored to walk that road with her.

Stay Connected

Show this incredible artist some love! Visit her official website at samanthagrimesmusic.com to hear the *Stripped* album and catch her on tour.

Samantha Grimes – Americana grown in the Midwest, carrying a guitar upside down, and taking the music world by storm, one humble note at a time.

We are so proud to call her one of our own. 🎶

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), and Michael Botte (ISSA Philadelphia Representative).

Michael Botte's 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!

This month is all about making a playlist of your OWN music on Spotify especially when you have new releases.

When you have a new release and send that "song specific URL" to that song to folks to listen, when they are done playing the song, Spotify will then "recommend" another song to keep the listener on the platform. From what I have seen that song will be from another artist (not you) that Spotify thinks they may be interested in. Thats cool but in this scenario, you are promoting yourself so sending your "song specific URL" may only get you one spin.
So how can we get around that? By making a playlist of your own music to promote.

When you make a playlist of your own music (especially around new releases), you put your new song on top and then place other songs from your catalog on the playlist. I would try put songs positioned below your new release that are similar in genre and style because once your new song is played, Spotify will then go through your ENTIRE PLAYLIST exposing the listener to your WHOLE CATALOG and NOT just the new release. This could get you many streams not only for the new release but for all your music. PLUS, the playlist can be saved.
Here is an example: **https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1bueARc3HjWEpQ459jWwPC**
So COOL!!!! As an ISSA Representative, I must ensure I am serving my community.

🙏

Thank you, family!

THIS IS The Michael Botte Band



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.

The True Flex: The Grind in full Imposter syndrome.

We talk a massive amount about the grind in this industry. We constantly dissect the ever-changing algorithms, the non-existent budgets, the exhausting social media funnels, and the relentless hustle it takes just to get a single track noticed. But if we are being completely, brutally honest with ourselves, the most toxic adversity we will ever face doesn't come from a dismissive playlist curator, a cold gatekeeper, or a bad review. It lives entirely between our own ears.

For independent musicians, imposter syndrome isn't just a fleeting moment of self-doubt. It is a quiet, devastating career killer. It's that persistent, nasty little voice whispering that your talent is just a fluke, your recent wins were just dumb luck, and it's only a matter of time before the entire industry finds out you're a total fraud. You know the vibe—you hit a milestone and instantly think, "Great, now everyone is going to realize I'm just winging it." When you are operating as your own manager, booking agent, PR team, investor, and occasional therapist, letting that mindset take the wheel is a dangerous roadblock. It paralyzes you. It's the reason you hesitate to send that pitch email, freeze up in front of the camera, or hold back from making a crucial connection.

And let me let you in on a little secret: it doesn't just happen to artists. Even I, as a promoter, struggle with imposter syndrome. There are days where that voice creeps into my head too, trying to tell me I haven't earned my place. But as a professional promoter, let me tell you where the real magic happens: it's the true grit of the grind. There is an absolute, intoxicating power in creating something massive out of a whole lot of nothing.

When you have a corporate budget, you can just throw money at a wall until something sticks. That's not promotion; that's just buying noise. But when you are working on an absolute nothing budget? That is where the real grit comes alive, because you can't buy your way out of a corner. You have to out-think, out-hustle, and out-maneuver everyone else in the room. Operating on a shoestring forces you into pure, unfiltered creativity. It strips away the fluff and leaves you with the raw essentials: strategy, hustle, and genuine human connection. When you pull off a win with zero dollars in the bank, that is the ultimate flex. It proves that your strategy and your music are so undeniably good that the industry had no choice but to pay attention.

But you cannot build that kind of momentum if you are fighting the battle in isolation, drowning in your own head.

This is exactly why being an ***ISSA member*** is the ultimate advantage. When your brain tells you to quit and go buy a corporate cubicle, this global family acts as your mental shield. ***ISSA*** peers are there to lift you up, validate your hustle, and remind you exactly who the hell you are.

This is how we collectively pave new paths for independent musicians in an industry that wasn't originally built for us to win on our own terms. This is the very core of Tamanie Dove's vision and purpose. She didn't build this association to be a stuffy country club; she built it to be a sanctuary, a powerhouse, and a vehicle for independent creators to find their voice and their collective strength without needing a corporate green light.

Because I believe in this movement so deeply, I make it a priority to give back constantly. I advocate for this family every single day, and I am consistently dragging my own professional connections, artists, and industry peers into the ISSA circle—sometimes kicking and screaming, but always for their own good. We don't just network here; we look out for each other's mental game and clear the road for one another.

We have to change the narrative together. Stop giving luck all the credit: Luck didn't write your songs, and luck didn't build your momentum. You did. Own your wins, and let your ISSA family celebrate them with you.

Ditch perfection for real connection: Your audience isn't looking for a flawless, sterile, corporate-packaged pop star who never sweats. They want the grit. They want the truth. They want raw, real connection—and perfection is boring anyway.

Lean into the discomfort: Feeling like an imposter just means you are pushing past your comfort zone into new territory. Growth is supposed to feel uncomfortable. It means your talent is outgrowing your old headspace. *Send an email with the word "Imposter" to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com and you'll receive a free Summit Raffle Ticket.*

This business will always find new hurdles to throw at us, but we cannot afford to be our own worst enemy—and we don't have to navigate it alone. Stop second-guessing your right to be here. Lean into this community, bring your connections into the fold, own your unique talent, claim your space with authority, and keep pushing forward. You earned your seat at this table, so pull up a chair.

Be real. Be loud. Keep creating!
Angela Marie Eidenmiller
Associate Director of Artist Relations,
ISSA

Polyverse Music Returns as an ISSA Partner for 2026 – Even Bigger & Better!



We are thrilled to announce that **Polyverse Music** – the innovative force behind cutting-edge vocal processing and sound design plugins – has renewed its partnership with the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) for our **2026 Awards Show & Summit** (August 20–22, Atlanta)!

After a hugely successful collaboration last year, Polyverse is once again stepping up with incredible generosity. They are providing **nine (9) full software bundles** to support our winners and our Summit community.

What's included for ISSA's 2026 Awards

Each **1st place Gold winner** in the following six categories will receive the **complete "All Polyverse Plugins" bundle** – (each bundle is valued at $694 each):

- **USA Female Vocalist of the Year**
- **USA Male Vocalist of the Year**
- **USA Sound Engineer of the Year**
- **International Female Vocalist of the Year**
- **International Male Vocalist of the Year**
- **International Sound Engineer of the Year**

POLYVERSE

In addition, **three (3) extra bundles** will be raffled off during the Summit to help defray event costs (the Summit remains **free** for all ISSA members to attend).

Polyverse in the Spotlight – Recent News

Polyverse Music has been making major waves in the pro-audio world. Their flagship plugin **Manipulator** was recently spotted in Hollywood – used during the sound design breakdown of the hit Netflix series **Stranger Things**.

👉 Read the story here

That same plugin is also featured in an interactive exhibit at **The Grammy® Museum**, thanks to artist **Moldover**, who used Manipulator to create his element of the museum's Sonic Playground.

👉 See the Grammy Museum feature

And top vocal artists like **Priska** rely on Polyverse plugins to shape their sound.

👉 Hear what artists are saying

🙏 A Heartfelt Thank You

We are deeply grateful to **Assaf & Adrian** and the entire Polyverse Music team for believing in ISSA and our community of songwriters, vocalists, and producers. Their tools are used by professionals worldwide – and now, our Gold winners will have the same world-class firepower at their fingertips.

Stay tuned for more partner announcements, and don't forget to mark your calendars for **August 20–22, 2026** in Atlanta. Let's make this year's Awards Show & Summit the best one yet!

The ISSA Summit is **FREE to attend** – and this year, you can register ahead of time. We're expecting our biggest turnout yet, so don't assume there will be space at the door.

To register: Email Todd Apfel at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** with how many people are in your party and their names.

VERY IMPORTANT: Only the first **100 people to register** are guaranteed a **T-Mobile Thermal Cooler Bag and a Beverage Tumbler**. These are legit – don't miss out.



Your 2026 ISSA Awards Show & Summit Schedule:

We've packed three days of music, networking, education, and celebration into one epic weekend. Here is what to expect:

Thursday, August 20th

•**9:00 am – 4:00 pm: ISSA Summit** (Marriott Courtyard) – Get ready for industry insights and networking.

Friday, August 21st

- **9:00 am – 3:00 pm: ISSA Summit** (Marriott Courtyard) – Wrapping up the educational sessions.
- **5:00 pm – 11:00 pm: ISSA Pre-Party** (The Wild Wing Cafe, Alpharetta) – Kick off the weekend with **five bands** rocking the stage! (Address: 5530 Windward Pkwy, Alpharetta, GA 30004). *Pre-purchased wristbands required.*

Saturday, August 22nd (The Big Day!)

- **12:00 pm (Noon): Red Carpet Interviews** begin at the **Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center** (Home of The BMI Awards!). Professional photographers will capture your red carpet moment.
- **2:00 pm – 5:00 pm: 2026 ISSA Awards Show** – This prestigious, formal, recorded event is your time to shine.
- **5:00 pm – Until Late: ISSA After Party** (Back to The Wild Wing Cafe) – Let loose with your fellow artists in an intimate setting. The food is fabulous, the vibes are high, and we suspect this party will go into the wee hours.



Night Time Around The Fire Pit

An attendee favorite happens each night as artists gather in the courtyard relaxing, networking, putting together impromptu jam sessions and creating new friendships that are sure to last forever.



Welcome To Your Host Hotel

We've partnered with the beautiful **Marriott Courtyard Atlanta Perimeter Center** (our host hotel where the Summit takes place) to get you a great discount. But you have to follow these three simple steps *today*:

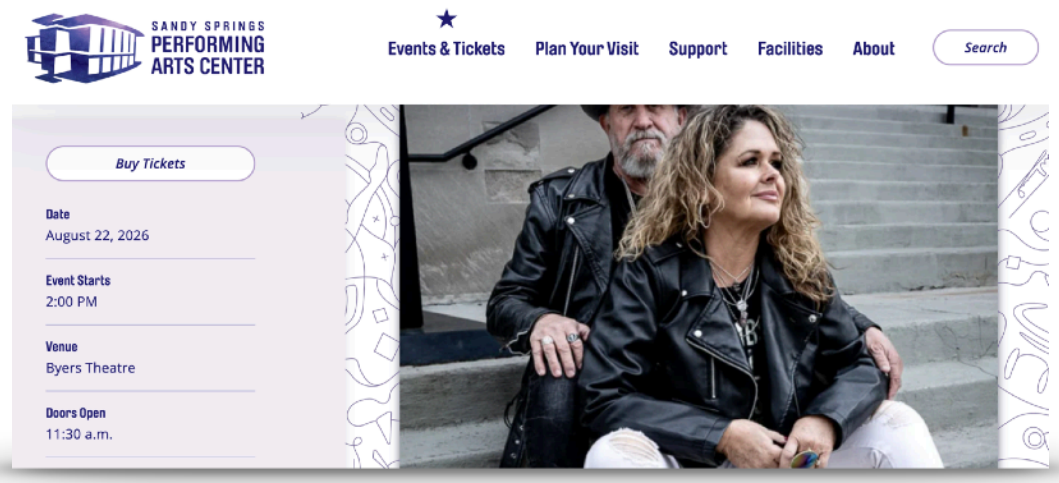
1. **Go to our tickets page:** https://issasongwriters.com/tickets/
2. **Click the "ISSA Awards Show Tickets" button.** (See screenshot below 👇).







3. This will take you to the **Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center Ticketing Page**



4. **Purchase your Awards Show tickets.** Once you've got that receipt, take a screenshot of it and email it to **issasongwriters@gmail.com**.
Boom. In return, you will receive a ***personal discount link*** to book your room at the Marriott Courtyard Atlanta Perimeter Center.



You've done the work. You've got the talent. Now, show up and celebrate it.

So what are you waiting for? The red carpet is being rolled out, the bands are warming up, and a discounted hotel room has your name on it.

Book the room. Buy the ticket. See you in Atlanta!

For more information about this year's Awards Show, visit issasongwriters.com.

Warning: There are a *limited* amount of these discounted rooms. When they're gone, they're gone. Don't be the one paying full price because you waited an extra day!

Karaoke Under the Stars? You Tell Us!



Every night at the ISSA Summit, the courtyard fire pit becomes our living room—guitars come out, songs are shared, and the magic of songwriting fills the air. But let's be honest: not all of us can fingerpick like a pro, and some of us would rather hide behind an adult beverage than a six-string. The good news? We *all* love to sing—especially after a little liquid courage.

That's why Chad Rivette has generously offered to bring his karaoke setup to the 2026 Summit. Imagine swapping the fire pit for a microphone, belting out your favorite hits (or your own tunes) with a backing track, no guitar required. Shy singers welcome—adult beverages optional but encouraged.

So what do you say? Would a karaoke night add to the Summit fun? Drop a quick email to **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** and let Todd know if you're in, *add Karaoke in the email for a free Summit Raffle ticket*. If there's enough interest, we'll turn the courtyard into a stage. Don't be shy—speak up (into the mic, that is).

Summit Raffle Alert: Indulge Your Senses with Skin-Juice

We're thrilled to announce that Tamanie Dove and **Skin-Juice** have donated **four complete product sets** (each valued at $50) to be raffled off during the **ISSA Summit this August in Atlanta**!

What does Skin Juice bring to the table? *Smells like dessert. Feels like luxury.* Their foaming body scrubs and rich moisturizers work together for an **ultra-soft finish** that turns everyday routines into unforgettable self-care rituals.

Each set features handcrafted goat milk soaps, Second Skin Moisturizers, Lip Seal conditioning treatments, and more — all designed to feel indulgent, comforting, and beautiful.

Don't miss your chance to win, purchase raffle tickets and treat yourself to a little luxury.

👉 Shop Skin Juice on Etsy | Instagram | Facebook





Hidden Keywords Found – And You Can Now Buy Raffle Tickets in Advance for the 2026 ISSA Summit!

In last month's ISSA Summit Newsletter, we hid three special keywords inside three different sentences. Readers who found them and emailed the keyword to Todd Apfel would receive free Raffle Tickets for the 2026 ISSA Summit Raffle. The Summit takes place **August 20 & 21 in Atlanta**.

We are pleased to announce that **Andy Smith** and **Dawn Rix** each found some of the hidden sentences.

- **Dawn Rix** discovered the keyword **“LABEL”** and earns **1 extra Raffle Ticket**.
- **Andy Smith** found not only **“LABEL”** but also **“GOLD”** – so he receives **2 extra Raffle Tickets**.

Unfortunately, no one found the third hidden sentence containing the keyword **“CONGRESS.”** Keep reading future issues of the newsletter – you never know when the next hidden word might appear!

Buy Your Raffle Tickets in Advance – No Need to Wait Until Atlanta!

For the first time, you can purchase your Raffle Tickets ahead of time using **PayPal** or **Venmo**. Just send an email to **Todd Apfel** at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com**, and he will reply with his payment information.

Pricing:

- $1 for 1 ticket
- $5 for 7 tickets
- $10 for 15 tickets
- $20 for 40 tickets
- $50 for 125 tickets

Current Raffle Prize Lineup (More to Come!)

So far, we have the following items confirmed for the 2026 ISSA Summit Raffle:

- **1** Handmade Cigar Box Guitar from Stogie Joe Guitars
- **1** Pair of Wireless Professional Headphones from AIAIAI Audio
- **3** Audio Plugins from PSP Audioware
- **3** Audio Plugins from Polyverse
- **1** 100-CD Duplication Package from Atomic Disc
- **4** Box Sets of Skin Care Products from Tamanie Dove & Skin-Juice

We will be adding more prizes over the next few months. Don’t miss your chance to win – buy your raffle tickets early and keep an eye out for future hidden keywords in the newsletter!



Music Industry News!

News From Around The World That Affects All Of Us

PROTECT YOUR MUSIC AND YOUR NAME:

Why Independent Artists Need to Act Now



As independent artists, we pour our hearts into our songs, our performances, and our brands. But two major changes brewing in the world of music could make it harder—and more expensive—to protect what you've built. Here's what you need to know about a new copyright proposal and why trademarking your artist name is just as essential.

New Copyright Proposal: A Price Hike That Hurts Indie Artists

In March 2026, the U.S. Copyright Office proposed an average 43% fee increase across its services, including for music registration. Here's the breakdown:

- **The "Single Application"** ($45 *for a single author registering one work*) *would be eliminated entirely*. *DIY artists would be forced into the* $85 Standard Application category — effectively an 89% price hike.
- **Group registration for an album** would jump from $65 *to* $130.



Top Music Attorney Krystle Delgado has been sounding the alarm. In a recent episode of her podcast, she explained that "a major copyright office proposal could create serious consequences for independent artists and creators." As AI lawsuits, streaming struggles, and creator rights battles continue to grow, she pointed out that many artists are starting to ask who the system is really working for anymore.

Industry groups, including the American Association of Independent Music (A2IM), have formally opposed the hikes. Their message is blunt: "A 43% fee hike, imposed on independent artists and labels who are already navigating compressed streaming royalties, stagnant per-stream rates, and no ability to pass through costs, is not cost recovery; it is a barrier to justice".

Here's the hard truth: without copyright registration, you can't sue for infringement, claim statutory damages (up to $150,000 per willful violation), or recover attorney's fees. This proposal threatens to make that essential legal protection unaffordable for many.

Why Trademarking Your Artist Name Is Just as Critical

Copyright protects your songs. But what protects your artist name? That's a trademark.

Many artists don't realize that copyright law doesn't cover names, logos, or brand identities. If you haven't trademarked your stage name, another artist could legally claim it first, force you off streaming platforms, and erase years of branding overnight.

Independent singer-songwriter ***Levina*** learned this the hard way. She received an email from her distributor saying her music had been removed from all digital streaming services — because someone else had registered the trademark to her artist name and reported her profile. After consulting lawyers, she discovered that the first person to register the trademark in any country for the relevant category has priority. Her best option? Change her name.

Registering your trademark gives you exclusive national rights to your name, prevents others from profiting off your brand, and makes it easier to remove impersonators from social media and streaming platforms. As one attorney put it, "If you're an individual artist using a stage name, it's very valuable to protect that name because that is a brand".

What You Can Do Right Now

1. **Register your existing music now.** The proposed fees aren't final yet, but if you have a backlog of unreleased songs or a new album, consider registering them soon.
2. **Speak up.** The public comment period on the fee proposal is part of the process. Your voice as an independent artist matters.
3. **Trademark your artist name.** USPTO filing fees start around $350 per class (Class 41 covers live performances; Class 9 covers recorded music). It's an investment in your future.

Independent artists have always had to fight for recognition. Now, we need to fight for our rights, too. Your music — and your name — are worth protecting.

Disclaimer: This information is for educational purposes and not legal advice. Consult an attorney for your specific situation.

Special thanks to Top Music Attorney Miss Krystle (Krystle Delgado) for bringing these issues to light. Visit topmusicattorney.com for more resources.

The Monthly AI Check-In: What You Need to Know This Month



Before we dive into this month's updates, a quick reminder: Last month we explained why we're dedicating so much space to AI in these pages. The short version? This isn't just a tech story—it's the story that will define the next decade of your career as an independent singer-songwriter. Laws and platform policies are changing rapidly, often driven by tech giants rather than artists. Ignorance is no longer an option. So each month, we'll give you one simple, focused update on what's happened, what you need to know, and what you need to do. No panic. Just action. Here's what you need to know this month.

What Happened in May: The 30-Second Summary

The good news: Spotify's "Verified" badge launched, and it's excluding AI artists. YouTube rolled out new AI labeling rules. And a new federal AI law just passed that gives you real legal power against deepfakes.

The concerning news: Deezer is now seeing **75,000 AI-generated songs uploaded every single day**—that's over 2 million per month. AI music now makes up 44% of all new deliveries on Deezer. Your royalties are being diluted.

What you need to do THIS week: Keep reading. We've got a simple 3-step action plan at the end.

Streaming Services: Who's Fighting AI Fraud (And Who Isn't)

Last month we promised we'd cover which streaming services are fighting back. Here's the scorecard:

✅ **Deezer** – Currently the most aggressive. They built an AI-detection tool and are actively removing AI spam. They're the ones who gave us the 75,000-songs-per-day number, which means they're actually looking.

✅ **Spotify** – Moving in the right direction. The new "Verified by Spotify" badge (light green checkmark) explicitly excludes AI-generated artists and personas. They've also removed over 75 million spammy tracks in the last year.

⚠️ **Apple Music** – Quiet. Too quiet. No major AI-fraud announcements yet.

⚠️ **YouTube** – New labeling rules are good, but enforcement is still unclear.

❌ **TikTok** – Still a wild west. AI songs go viral daily with no verification system in place.

What you should do: Prioritize building your presence on platforms that are actively protecting human artists. Deezer and Spotify are your best bets right now.

From Top Music Attorney: What Krystle Delgado Wants You to Know

We've been following entertainment attorney Krystle Delgado's podcast closely this month. Here are the most important takeaways for ISSA members:

1. Say No to Suno (and platforms like it)

Krystle sat down with the Music Artists Coalition to break down why AI music platforms like Suno and Udio are being sued. The short version: **they trained their AI models on millions of copyrighted songs without asking permission or paying a dime.** That's not "fair use"—that's mass piracy, according to the lawsuits.

What you should know: The Music Artists Coalition is fighting for **the Three C's**: Consent, Clarity, and Compensation. Independent artists need all three.

What you should do: Don't upload your music to AI training platforms. Read the terms of service before you click "agree."

2. YouTube's New AI Policy

YouTube now requires creators to label when their content contains AI-generated material. If you don't label it, YouTube may take action against your channel.

What you should know: This applies to AI-generated voices, faces, and music. Transparency is becoming mandatory, not optional.

What you should do: If you use AI for anything (even just cover art or video backgrounds), label it. Honesty protects you. If you have questions on what is or isn’t AI, the May ISSA Summit Newsletter had a great article on page 47.

3. The New Federal AI Law (This Is Big)

A new federal law just passed that gives creators legal protection against deepfakes, voice cloning, and unauthorized use of your likeness.

What you should know: Before this law, it was very hard to sue someone for cloning your voice or face without permission. Now you have legal standing. Krystle calls this "a game-changer for independent artists."

What you should do: Document everything. Keep records of your original recordings, your vocal characteristics, and your brand identity. If someone clones you, you now have legal options.

4. The Most Dangerous Trend: Your Likeness Being Used Without Permission

Krystle highlighted a case where actress Amy Jackson's likeness was used in an app ad without her consent. Dua Lipa is currently suing Samsung for $15 million over similar issues.

What you should know: Companies are hiding "rights to your likeness" in their terms of service. When you sign up for certain apps or platforms, you may be giving them permission to use your face, voice, or name in ads forever.

What you should do: Read terms of service before clicking "agree." If you can't understand the legalese, don't sign up. When in doubt, ask an attorney.

Your Action Plan for This Month

✅ **One thing to do TODAY:** Check the "human-made" box every single time you upload music through your distributor. DistroKid, TuneCore, CD Baby—they all have this option now. Use it.

✅ **One thing to do THIS WEEK:** Apply for Spotify's "Verified" badge. Update your artist profile with links to tour dates, merch stores, and social accounts. The badge is free and open to independents.

✅ **One thing to do THIS MONTH:** Review the terms of service for every platform you use. Look for language about "licensing your likeness" or "AI training." If you see it, decide consciously whether you're okay with it.

✅ **One thing to SHARE with your fans:** Add this line to your social bio or email signature:

"When you stream my music, 100% of your support goes to a real human singer-songwriter—not an algorithm."

The Bottom Line

This month's updates can feel like a lot. But here's the truth Krystle Delgado keeps coming back to: **Your humanity is your competitive advantage.**

The platforms are starting to listen. Deezer built detection tools. Spotify added verification badges. The federal government passed a new law. None of this would be happening if artists stayed silent.

Keep making real music. Keep telling your fans the truth. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the words "AI Update" to receive a free "Summit Raffle Coupon".* Keep reading these updates each month. And remember why we're doing this—not to fuel panic, but to make sure the songwriter remains the heart of the song.

Next month: We'll cover how to protect your voice from AI cloning—and what to do if someone already has.

Have questions or concerns about AI and your music? Email us at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com We read every message.



ISSA Artist Mentoring Program

This year, Linda Marks is hosting a mentoring segment at the ISSA Summit. In addition to a formal presentation on mentoring on Thursday afternoon, Linda will be creating opportunities for 1-on-1 mentoring sessions. In each session, one ISSA community member mentors another. We encourage you to be both a mentor and to be mentored. ***Sessions like this are what the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) and the Summit are all about—helping others and learning from one another.***

In order to build this program, we need YOU to let us know if you would like to mentor and if you would like to be mentored. All you have to do is click on the link below!

https://forms.gle/WRQk3sbxkEkftQQK9

Every month we receive questions about various subject from our members. We have decided to share these questions and our answers as you might be asking the same questions!



This month's questions have come from numerous ISSA members. Question 1:

Have we considered Approaching Sweetwater as a partner for the ISSA Awards Show & Summit?

Over the past few months, many of you have suggested that I reach out to Sweetwater to partner with us for the ISSA Awards Show and Summit. Here is the history – and the cold, hard truth – concerning our relationship with Sweetwater.

For eight years, the International Singer Songwriters Association has tried to build a meaningful partnership with Sweetwater. For each of those years, our own Tamanie Dove has purchased a Yamaha acoustic guitar from Sweetwater for our annual Toys for Tots raffle – and she has publicly credited Sweetwater as the donor. We did this not because we had to, but because we genuinely believed in supporting the companies that support musicians.

This year, we decided to try once more. After being declined through Sweetwater's online sponsorship form, a sales engineer named Tyler Phillips told us he "doesn't give up that easy" and would "move and shake" to find a way. We waited five months. We followed up. The answer came back: stickers. We already receive stickers from Sweetwater with every order we place, so honestly, that offer truly didn't move the needle.

We were disappointed. Not angry – disappointed. So I wrote directly to Sweetwater's CEO, Mike Clem. To his credit, he responded personally and promptly. Here is what he said:

"We receive hundreds of philanthropy and sponsorship requests each year... After careful review by our team, we were not able to move forward with support for your request at this time. ***Please know this is not a reflection of the value we see in what you're building****, but rather on the constraints of how we're able to allocate our support."*

We accept that answer. It was clear, professional, and respectful. And we thank Mr. Clem for his honesty.

But let's be direct with each other, with over 30,000 ISSA members. A conservative estimate suggests more than 60% of you purchase from Sweetwater regularly. You have been loyal. You have spent your money there. You have helped contribute to their $1.8 billion (that's not a misprint) in sales for 2025. And when we – your organization – asked for something modest in return, we were told no.

Let's also acknowledge that Sweetwater gave out more than $1 million to various organizations last year. To that, we applaud them. But we weren't asking for a large sum of money. We wanted a partner willing to offer product(s) for us to raffle – like many of our other partners do – or even a special ISSA group discount, as other partners have provided. Stickers simply did not demonstrate genuine support for what our members have done for Sweetwater over the years.

That is Sweetwater's right. It is not our place to demand anything. But it is our responsibility to tell you the truth about what happened.

So here is the truth: we tried. They declined. We asked again. They declined again. Now we are moving on.

The good news? We are already in active conversations with other music retailers who see our community differently – as an opportunity, not a form to be rejected. We will announce new partners in the coming weeks.

To Sweetwater: thank you for the gear you've sold our members over the years. We will continue to support you as individual customers, because you sell great products. But as an organization, our partnership journey with you ends here.

To our members: stay tuned. Better partnerships are coming.

– Todd Apfel, Executive Director of Corporate Development

Question 2:
I have noticed that my music seems to lack that"sheen" compared to music of my peers. Do I need to hire a producer and if so, how do I find one?

You've poured your heart into your music, received great feedback from peers, but that professional "sheen" still feels just out of reach. The conversations you're having with other artists point to a common resource—the music producer. But is a producer the secret ingredient you need? Let's break down what a producer actually does, whether you need one, and how to find the right partner for your artistic journey.

Do I Actually Need a Producer?

If you're aiming for release-ready, commercial-quality tracks that can compete on streaming platforms and radio, the answer is most likely yes. A seasoned music producer is more than someone who presses record—they are a creative partner and technical expert who brings structure, direction, and polish to a project. They help shape arrangements, coax out your best performances, and make crucial production decisions that a DIY setup often misses. Without that experience, artists working solo frequently waste hours chasing results a professional could achieve in a fraction of the time.

Think of it this way: a producer is to a recording as a director is to a movie. While you are the star, the producer guides the entire performance, ensuring every element serves the song and your unique vision. For a track ready for the world, that professional guidance is invaluable.

How to Find & Hire a Good Producer

Finding the right producer is a journey of discovery, not just a transaction. Here's where to start:

- **Online Marketplaces & Platforms:** Sites like **SoundBetter** (acquired by Spotify) offer a curated community of vetted professionals, including Grammy-winning engineers. You can post your project, listen to portfolios, and hire with confidence. **AirGigs** is another excellent marketplace where you can browse gigs and reviews from other artists.
- **Social Media & Community:** Instagram, TikTok, and dedicated music groups are hotspots for discovering talented producers showcasing their work. Look for creators whose style and sound authentically connects with your vision.
- **Personal Referrals:** As a member of the International Singer Songwriters Association, you have a built-in network. A personal recommendation from a trusted peer can be one of the most reliable ways to find a genuine collaborator.

Spotting the Pros vs. The "Wannabes"

A professional producer's portfolio should clearly demonstrate a high level of quality and, most importantly, experience in *your* genre. The best producers bring objectivity and a refined ear, but they should also make you feel heard. Avoid anyone who pressures you to change your core sound without a collaborative conversation. A major red flag is a lack of clear, written agreements. If a producer is hesitant to put terms in writing, walk away.

Avoiding Common & Costly Mistakes

Many artists learn these lessons the hard way. Here’s what to watch out for:

1. **Chasing Hype Over Fit:** A "hot" name or big follower count does not guarantee a good match for your sound.
2. **Focusing Solely on the Bottom Line:** The cheapest option rarely delivers professional results, but an expensive one doesn't guarantee magic either.
3. **Rushing the Decision:** This is a creative partnership. Take your time to interview multiple producers and trust your instincts.
4. **Skipping the Communication Check:** If you can't have an open, honest conversation about expectations and feedback, the collaboration is likely to suffer.
5. **Failing to Define Ownership:** Going into a project without a clear legal agreement on who owns what is the fastest way to a dispute.

Contracts, Costs, and Protecting Your Rights

Before a single note is recorded, get everything in writing. A simple, clear contract protects everyone.

- **Ownership (The #1 Issue):** The two main assets are the **Master Recording** (the final sound recording) and the **Composition** (the underlying song). Without a written "work-for-hire" agreement, your producer might own a portion of your master, which is standard in many deals. A work-for-hire agreement ensures *you* hold all intellectual property rights to the commissioned work.
- **Fees & Budgets:** Music production costs vary enormously. Beginner producers may charge $25 *to $*100 per hour, while established professionals can charge $500 *to $*2,000+ per hour. For a professional, release-ready single, you should budget anywhere from $2,000 *to $***10,000**. This typically covers producer direction, vocal production, mixing, and mastering. Be transparent about your budget from the start.

Your Next Step

Your music is good, and the desire for that extra "sheen" is a sign of an artist ready to grow. A producer isn't just an expense; they are an investment in your art and your career. By understanding the role, knowing where to look, asking the right questions, and securing your rights, you can find a partner who will help you create something truly special. Trust your gut, protect your work, and go make the music you've been dreaming of.

The Best Question I’ve Been Asked All Year (And Why It Makes Me So Happy)



I was just sitting down to write my final closing article for this edition of the *ISSA Summit Newsletter*, mentally preparing to once again put on my "begging hat" to ask for sponsors or beg for volunteers to help plan the big event. You know the drill. It’s necessary, but it’s not exactly the fun part of the job.

But then, something happened that completely changed my mood—and this article.

I received a message from an ISSA member and finalist for this year’s ISSA Awards Show & Summit (August 20-22 in Atlanta). They had a question about the advice I gave in last month’s newsletter—the advice about finalists posting their music everywhere to make it easier for the judges to find them.

And honestly? That question made my day. Why? Because it proves you all are actually *reading* these newsletters. You’re thinking. You’re strategizing. And that makes me happier than any sponsor announcement ever could.

So, thank you, (you know who you are). Let me answer your question publicly, because I think a lot of other finalists are wondering the same thing.

The Question to Me:

"Todd—I'm not trying to manipulate you or anything... I don't even know if you're an ISSA judge. Anyway, I was just wondering if, since my album is among the finalists, and considering the advice in the newsletter to make our music easy to find...should I post each track of the entire album on my website and social media for judging? The only reason I ask is because it seems, in a sense, to be almost self-defeating to put them on my website when most people usually go to Spotify or YouTube. Or am I thinking about it all wrong? Whatever the case, I definitely want to maximize my visibility for the judges. What are your thoughts—if I can ask without seeming improper?”

First off, (xxxx) —congratulations on being a finalist in **5 categories**! That is an incredible achievement, and you should be extremely proud.

Now, to answer your question (which, by the way, is a *great* question, so thank you for asking it):

I completely understand why you think it feels counter-productive to put your music on your website and social media when “most people” go directly to Spotify or YouTube. On the surface, that logic makes perfect sense.

But there are some dynamics at play here that I don’t think you’ve considered.

The Scale of What Our Judges Are Facing

Let me paint you a picture. Our judges have **42 categories** to work through. Each U.S. category has **30 finalists**. Each International category has at least **15 finalists**. Do the math—that’s over **750 finalists** they have to choose from. Yes, some artists (like yourself) appear in multiple categories, but that still leaves a mountain of music for every single judge to sort through.

And we have over **80 judges**—all of whom are Gold winners from the past two years.

So here’s the reality: every single judge has their *own* system for researching finalists. Some are Spotify power-users. Some live on YouTube. Some will literally just type your name into Google and see what comes up first.

This is why you post your music everywhere.

You’re not trying to replace Spotify or YouTube. You’re trying to make sure that no matter *which* platform a judge prefers—and no matter *how* they choose to search for you—your music is right there, one click away.

The Human Factor (And Why It Matters)

Now, I want to ask you a few questions. And I’m not trying to put you on the spot—I just want every finalist reading this to think about their own answers:

- How many of these 80+ judges are you friends with on social media?
- How many have you met in person?
- Is this your first year with ISSA? If not, have you attended the Awards Show or Summit in the past?

I apologize that I didn't recognize your name when you messaged me. But with over 30,000 members, it's hard for me to recall everyone. So what did I do? The same thing a judge would do. I looked you up on Facebook.

That's human nature.

Here's the best analogy I can give you. Yesterday was primary election day where I live. Imagine there are two people running for Mayor in your town. Candidate #1 is highly qualified on paper—great resume, great policies—but you've never met them. You went to the town hall meetings, you watched the debates, but you've never had a single conversation with them. All you know is what you've read.

Candidate #2 you *have* met in person. You've had one-on-one conversations. You know their backstory. You know what kind of person they are.

Even if Candidate #1 is equally or more qualified on paper, the human factor is real. That personal connection sways things.

The same is true here. Our judges are professionals who take their responsibility seriously. They vote based on the music. But they are also human beings. And if they know you—if they've met you, if they've had a conversation with you—that familiarity matters.

So What Should You Do?

Bottom line: make it as easy as humanly possible for every single judge to find your music. Post it on your website. Post it on your social media. Post it everywhere. Don't overthink it.

And more importantly—**come to Atlanta.**

I know what you're thinking. "*Todd, this is my first year as a finalist. The judges have already made their decisions for this year. What good is going to Atlanta now?*"





That's a fair question. But here's the truth: you're not just investing in *this* year's awards. You're investing in your entire career.

When you come to the ISSA Awards Show & Summit (August 20-22 in Atlanta), you'll be in a room full of artists—and some of those artists will be judges *next year*. You'll have access to:

- Two huge producers—one who's won a Grammy®, and one who's produced music for Grammy® award winners
- Sessions on how to actually move your career forward
- Networking opportunities that lead to collaborations (and collaborations are HUGE for growing your career)
- Friendships with fellow artists who aren't your competitors—they're your colleagues

Does showing up guarantee an award? No. But does it give you an advantage? Absolutely.

The Bigger Picture

Here's what I want you—and every finalist reading this—to walk away with.

If you're good enough to be a finalist (and you are), and lucky enough to win an award, you'll be winning something far more prestigious than awards from other shows. Why? Because of the sheer size of our membership, the volume of submissions, and the fact that our judging process is modeled after the Grammys®.

But even if you don't win this year—if you show up to Atlanta, you'll walk away with something far more valuable than any trophy. You'll walk away with knowledge, connections, and a network that supports you 365 days a year.

We are here to answer your questions and help you move your music career forward.

So yes—post your music everywhere. Make it easy for the judges. And then come to Atlanta, introduce yourself, and let the human factor work in your favor.

See you there.

Todd Apfel

P.S. – Thank you again for asking such a thoughtful question. You're thinking like a pro. Now go post those tracks.

We Encourage You To Please Patronize Our Valued ISSA Awards Show And Summit Partners!



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.