

The Road to Atlanta:

Whew… The voting for finalists is over. You put in the work; the daily reminders, the late-night social posts, the messages to fans, friends, and family asking for just one more click. We saw it. We appreciate it. And more importantly, *it mattered!*

This year, was record-breaking with **over 73,000 votes** cast during the month of April. In some categories, the last finalist spot came down to a single vote. A single vote!

So first things first…

To Our 2026 Finalists — Congratulations



You've earned your place. In just four short months, you've gone from nominee to finalist. And now, in less than four more months, you could be climbing the stairs to the stage at the prestigious Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center in Sandy Springs, Georgia, to accept your 2026 ISSA Award.

But let's be clear: your work isn't done. Not yet.

Over the coming weeks, your music and materials will be placed in the hands of this year's judging panel — all of whom are ISSA Gold Award winners from the past two years. These are artists who've stood where you're standing. They know what it takes. And they're evaluating with both skill and heart.

Here's what you need to know right now:

- **DO NOT** reach out or message the judges to ask for their vote or to ask them to listen to your music. Seriously. Don't.
- It **is** okay to like or comment on their social media posts — just don't be overzealous or obnoxious. Be human. Be supportive. Don't be transactional.
- **Make your music ridiculously easy to find.** Don't just drop a Spotify or Apple Music link. Judges have hundreds of artists to get through. The easier you make it, the better for you.
- Pin your song to the top of your social media accounts.
- Consider having your song start playing automatically when someone visits your website.
- Watch the Summit and ISSA Facebook pages for requests to add your music to judge playlists. More exposure = better.

This year, we've reminded our judges to listen for more than just sound and skill. We've asked them to listen for **spirit**. They're looking for artists who will represent ISSA with authenticity, generosity, and heart. Artists who will use their recognition not just as an achievement — but as a platform to inspire others.

That's the kind of artist who walks away a winner, whether or not their name is called on August 22nd!

To Those Who Didn't Become Finalists — This Is Not a Stop Sign

We need you to hear this clearly: **Do not despair!**

You poured yourself into this campaign. You rallied your people. You showed up. And that energy? It didn't disappear. It's still yours to spend — you just need to point it in a new direction.

Think of this as a springboard into next year's ISSA Awards. But more importantly, think of it as fuel for *right now* — because the single best thing you can do for your career, your network, and your future chances isn't waiting for next April.

It's waiting for you **August 20–22 in Atlanta** at the **ISSA Awards Show & Summit**.

Here's what you'll find there that can change everything for you:

- **Networking with fellow artists** who are on the exact same road you're on.
- **Direct access to past ISSA winners** who've figured out what works.
- **Industry specialists and PR pros** who can help you get heard, seen, and booked.
- **Summit seminars** designed to build your career from the ground up.
- And most importantly for those looking ahead to 2027: **a seminar hosted by some of this year's judges themselves** — where they'll openly discuss what they look for when making their decisions and answer your questions.

You don't have to guess what judges want. You can go sit in a room with them and ask.

That's not consolation. That's a competitive advantage.

Instead of us telling you what attending the Awards Show & Summit can do, we reached out to past attendees for their own words. Here's what they had to say…

ANDREW CHAPPELL

"Networking is important. The relationships you make in those rooms can be a game changer. Some of the conversations that start on a red carpet or in the hallway turn into collaborations, opportunities, and friendships down the road. Even if you don't walk away with a trophy, you can walk away with something more valuable."



Andy Smith

I had only been a member for 9 months when I went to Atlanta. I didn't know what to expect or who anybody was let alone think about the possibility of winning something.

But it was one of the best experiences of my musical life. I was greeted with warmth, friendship and heart and the people - wow - the people are all just amazing. So many friends made that will last forever.

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- Andy Continued -

Then I won International Single of the Year Award - Silver for "I Want To Take You Far". Blown away! I've had interviews in the press and radio at home in Australia and in my former home of England. I have radio and podcast interviews lined up in the US and I've been asked to collaborate with a few US and Canadian artists and also possibly produce a track or two for others as well.

I you've never been before, you'd never dream how good it is and how amazing the people you'll meet are. It's taken and taking my musical career to the next level. The support from your peers, the exposure to people knowing who you are when you release singles is something money can't buy!





Emily Judson

"Attending the International Singer-Songwriters Association Awards Show & Summit isn't just about the glamour—it's about connection and encouragement.

As an independent artist, these events have been vital for me in gaining knowledge from industry professionals, connecting and learning from other artists' experiences and building relationships that have led to musical collaborations, opportunities, and lifelong friendships.

There is nothing quite like feeling the energy of a



Frank Blair

"I believe every member should go to the ISSA awards show , finalist or not. You meet so many great people that are of the same mindset, and have so much knowledge . Its a great way to network, learn, and collaborate"

Alan Garmonsway -

Hopefully my contribution might resonate somewhere!.... 'I look back a year and compare it with where I am now as an artist. Now, I don't feel like I'm on my own, creating songs for an Internet void. I feel a much more complete contributor to the musical world - part of a community of like-minded musical artists across the globe! I can listen, comment, get feedback and contribute in all sorts of ways. It's about connecting with like-minded souls, whatever the genre or approach. Why the change? I went to the 2025 ISSA Summit and Awards. I don't usually enter awards, but ISSA always struck me as a place that was there for you 24/7. Going to Atlanta last year gave me a new base line – a new perception of myself as a more serious player with a better understanding of how to approach writing and recording in the future. Being in that environment with so many people with so many different skills and approaches to the music industry was really powerful. There's an old saying that 'turning up is 50% of the battle'! I'm so glad I turned up. Winning a Gold Award was the icing on the cake, and I'm sure it's helped since, but if I search my soul, just being there was actually the biggest prize!'





Birdy Young

Attending the International Singer-Songwriters Association Awards for the first time in 2025 was truly unforgettable. Becoming an active member that year ended up being one of the most impactful decisions I've made, not just for my career but for my personal growth as well.

What makes ISSA so special is that it genuinely feels like a family. Tamanie Dove and her incredible team have created a community that lifts up independent artists and provides real, practical tools for success. Whether that's learning about sync licensing, understanding music releases, gaining industry insight, or even something as specific (and important) as properly tagging your music for radio.

My weekend in Atlanta was filled with incredible moments. I had the honor of meeting artists and professionals from all over the world and even fulfilling a dream by stepping onto the stage to accept an award for something I created. But beyond the highlights, what stayed with me most were the connections I built behind the scenes, the knowledge I gained, and the lasting memories created along the way.

One of the most valuable parts of the experience was attending the free summit offered during awards weekend. Hearing directly from Grammy-winning musicians and producers and absorbing the wisdom they shared made the entire trip worthwhile on its own.

I would absolutely encourage anyone, even those who aren't nominated, to attend. The relationships you form, the education you receive, and the inspiration you walk away with are truly priceless.

This year, I'm honored to return as a main stage performer with my band, Hideaway Honey, and I'm so excited to reconnect with friends from across the globe.

Chad Rivette



Even if you think your name won't be called, you still belong in the room where the music never really stops playing, because the real win starts long before the final note.

Past Gold winners often say the same thing, the award was just the chorus, but the verses that changed their lives happened in the hallways, at the summit sessions, and under the glow of the red carpet lights.

It's in those moments, shaking hands with judges who become mentors, sharing stories with fellow artists who turn into collaborators, and standing shoulder to shoulder with people who understand the grind, that your next opportunity quietly begins to take shape.

Some winners admit they almost didn't attend, convinced they wouldn't take home the trophy, only to realize later that showing up was the turning point in their journey.

The conversations you have here can echo far beyond this event, like a melody that sticks with you long after the song ends.

For those who didn't make finalist this time, the stage is still being set for your future, because being present means being seen, being heard, and being remembered.

In this industry, timing is everything, and sometimes the right connection at the right moment can be more powerful than any award itself.

The summit offers knowledge that sharpens your craft, the red carpet offers visibility that elevates your presence, and the people you meet offer harmonies that can carry your career to new heights.

Every artist's path is a composition of risks, resilience, and relationships, and this is one of those rare spaces where all three come together in perfect rhythm.

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- Chad Continued -

So whether you're holding a finalist spot, sitting just outside the spotlight, or simply questioning if it's worth the trip, REMEMBER THIS - The music doesn't just happen on stage, it happens in every conversation, every introduction, every shared dream.

Show up, step into the moment, and let yourself be part of something bigger than a single award.

Because sometimes the greatest standing ovation you'll ever receive starts with the simple decision to be in the room where your future is quietly tuning up.

Can't wait to meet you all the 2026 ISSA Awards in Atlanta,
Safe Travels & Stay Blessed

Chad Rivette

-2024 International Entertainer of the Year GOLD
-2025 Judge & Presenter
-2026 Judge, Presenter & After Awards Performer

The Votes Are In, The Finalists Are Set… Now Let's Get You to Atlanta!



What a rush! The ballots have been counted, the Finalists have been notified, and the excitement for the 2026 ISSA Awards Show & Summit is officially reaching a fever pitch. If you've been waiting for a sign to start packing your bags, this is it.

Now that the hard part (voting!) is behind us, it's time to focus on the ***fun*** part: planning your adventure to the musical mecca of the South—Atlanta, Georgia. And that adventure starts with two very important clicks: grabbing your Awards Show tickets and locking in your hotel room.

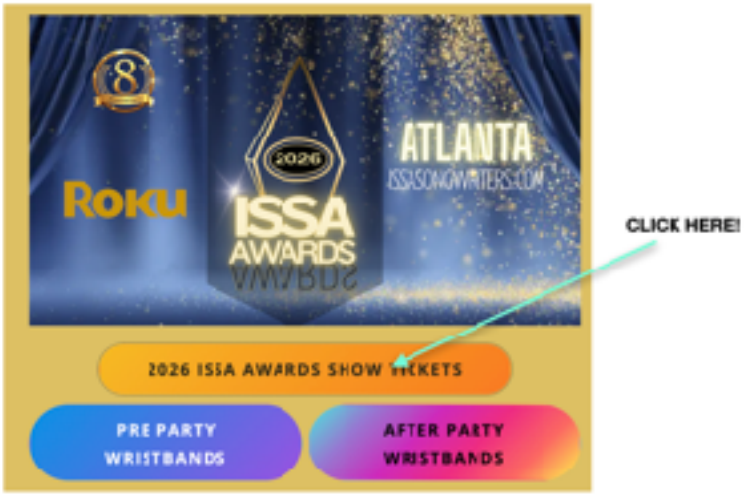
Here is the good news: We've made this process incredibly easy for you.

Here is the *urgent* news: Hotel rooms are going fast, and you don't want to be stuck in traffic when you could be networking by the pool.

How to Score Your 40% Off Hotel Room (Yes, 40%!)

We've partnered with the beautiful **Marriott Courtyard Atlanta Perimeter Center** (our host hotel where the Summit takes place) to get you a massive 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 👇). This will take you to the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center Ticketing Page.



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*** for **40% off** your normal room rate at the Marriott Courtyard Atlanta Perimeter Center.

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!



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. (Email the word GOLD to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com for a free Summit raffle ticket)
- **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.

The Bottom Line

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.

Stay tuned to the Summit Newsletter and the ISSA Summit Facebook page for all the information you'll need regarding the Summit



We've Got BIG NEWS!

Just confirmed... Today (Sunday May 3rd), a dynamic music industry icon has agreed to give a presentation on Thursday at the 2026 Summit right after Tamanie's opening speech. Although we can't divulge who this is until our June Summit Newsletter, we can confirm that you should definitely make sure that you will be attending both days of the Summit.

Thank You, AIAIAI Audio! Returning as a 2026 ISSA Summit Partner



We are thrilled to share the wonderful news that **AIAIAI Audio** has once again signed on as a partner for the **2026 ISSA Summit**, taking place **August 21 & 22 in Atlanta, GA**. To our community of independent artists, this is a partnership that truly matters, and we are incredibly grateful to have AIAIAI back with us as we gear up for another incredible weekend of music, networking, and celebration.

AIAIAI is a **Danish audio company founded in 2006 with a clear mission: to empower the future of music creation** by breaking down technical, cultural, and creative barriers. Their innovative modular headphone systems are trusted by music creators on the road, in the studio, and on stages around the world. With a heritage in Scandinavian design and a responsible, sustainable philosophy, it's no wonder their products are part of the permanent collection at the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**.

The Gift of Wireless Freedom

Last year, AIAIAI generously donated a **TMA-2 Studio W+ headphone with its hard shell case ($349 value)** to be raffled off at the Summit. They also provided a **20% off discount coupon** to every single attendee for use in their online store.

We are proud to announce that **AIAIAI** has graciously agreed to repeat their entire donation for our 2026 Summit, giving another lucky ISSA member the chance to experience true professional wireless audio.

The winner of last year's raffle was singer-songwriter **Alan Garmonsway**, who currently uses the headphones in his studio. In fact, Alan relied on them during the recording of his latest album, *An Elephant In The Room*, proving that these headphones are more than just a luxury—they are a legitimate creative tool.

More Than Wireless: A Professional-Grade Tool

If you're a creator who has been hesitant about using wireless headphones for serious music production, AIAIAI is the brand that changes the game.

Standard Bluetooth headphones are often a non-starter in the studio due to **latency delays of up to a quarter of a second** (250ms) and compression that degrades audio quality. AIAIAI solves both problems at once with its proprietary **W+ Link technology**, which uses a dedicated radio-frequency transmitter to provide **ultra-low latency and uncompressed audio**.



The W+ Link technology delivers:

- **Cable-like responsiveness**: With latency under 10ms, you can play instruments or record vocals while monitoring with almost no perceivable difference compared to a wired connection. Users describe it as "effectively zero" lag.
- **Studio-grade sound quality**: The headphones feature a **bio-cellulose diaphragm** speaker unit, made from bacterial cellulose, which is **stiffer, lighter, and stronger than standard PET units**. This results in a critically-acclaimed sound stage with a highly detailed, balanced representation, helping you hear every nuance of your mix.
- **Uncompromising audio**: Unlike Bluetooth which compresses audio, W+ Link maintains superior quality with a stable, interference-free signal.
- **All-day comfort**: The lightweight build, memory-foam cushions, and ergonomic headband are designed to keep you in the creative zone for hours of comfortable wear.
- **Modular, sustainable design**: The TMA-2 line is fully modular, meaning individual parts can be easily swapped, replaced, or upgraded. This means you're not just buying headphones—you're investing in a long-term audio solution that reduces electronic waste.

For singers, multi-instrumentalists, and producers who crave the freedom to move around their home studio, live room, or performance stage without being tethered by cables, AIAIAI finally offers a solution that doesn't force you to sacrifice sound quality.

Join Us in Thanking AIAIAI Audio

We are honored to have AIAIAI Audio as a returning partner for the 2026 ISSA Summit. Their generosity and commitment to supporting independent artists align perfectly with our mission.

Be sure to visit their website at **https://aiaiai.audio/** to explore their gear and make sure you're at the Summit for your chance to win the TMA-2 Studio W+ headphones!

From all of us at ISSA: thank you, AIAIAI, for once again investing in our community.

Karaoke Under the Stars? You Tell Us!

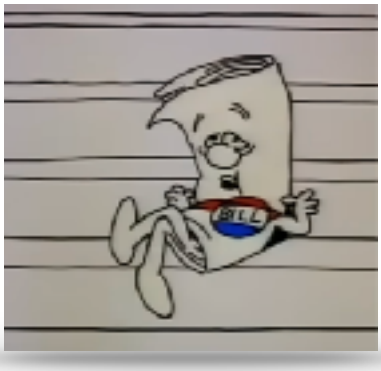


Every night at the ISSA Summit, the courtyard fire pit becomes our living room—guitars come out, songs are shared, and the magic of songwriting fills the air. But let's be honest: not all of us can fingerpick like a pro, and some of us would rather hide behind an adult beverage than a six-string. The 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. If there's enough interest, we'll turn the courtyard into a stage. Don't be shy—speak up (into the mic, that is).

Check This Out!



YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: WHY FAIR PAY STAYS IN THE SHADOWS

For the past two months, the ISSA Summit Newsletter has been shining a steady spotlight on two critical pieces of legislation: the ***American Music Fairness Act*** and the ***Living Wage for Musicians Act***. We've explained the loopholes, tracked the hearings, and called on you to contact your representatives.

We've done this because fair pay for musicians isn't some niche industry squabble—it's the difference between being able to make a living from your art and watching your music generate millions of streams while you earn spare change.

And yet, despite our coverage and the hard work of advocates on Capitol Hill, this issue somehow stays frustratingly under the radar. It gets swept under the carpet, drowned out by louder political headlines, or dismissed as "something the big labels will handle." I'm afraid even some of our own ***ISSA members*** haven't fully grasped just how monumental these bills could be for their own careers. If passed, they would fundamentally reshape how you get paid —for radio play, for streaming, and for your very likeness in the age of AI.

So let's rip the carpet back up. Here is exactly what has happened in the past month, where things stand right now, and—most importantly—what ***you*** have done to move the needle.

Since our last update, the movement for fair pay has taken some big strides forward while hitting a few familiar roadblocks. It has been a busy few months on Capitol Hill and in city councils across the country, so let's catch up on everything that's happened.

AMFA Gets Some Real Traction

The big story this month is the American Music Fairness Act. This is the bill that would finally end the decades-old loophole allowing AM/FM radio stations to play recorded music without paying the artists who made it.

On April 14, Grammy Award-winning artist ***Mýa*** went to Capitol Hill with ***SoundExchange*** executives to personally champion the legislation. Alongside her, over 40 musicians signed a letter to lawmakers urging them to pass ***AMFA***. Mýa stated at the time:

"I'm proud to support the American Music Fairness Act because it reflects a balanced approach — one that recognizes the value of music, supports fair pay for artists, and respects the important role of local, college, and noncommercial stations."

In the following days, the House Judiciary Committee scheduled a markup for the bill—a crucial procedural step that brings legislation one step closer to a full House vote. Meanwhile, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) has come out swinging against it, urging radio stations to "act today to protect radio". The opposition remains fierce, but this is the furthest AMFA has advanced in years.

The Living Wage for Musicians Act Gains Local Support

The Living Wage for Musicians Act (LWMA), which would create a penny-per-stream royalty, is still stalled in Congress. But it is making major waves at the local level. Over the past two months:

- **Pittsburgh**, PA: The City Council passed a resolution on April 28th, 2026, calling on Congress to pass the LWMA during the 2027 legislative session.
- **Chicago**, IL: The City Council passed Resolution R2026-0024901, formally urging Congress to pass and President Trump to sign the LWMA.
- **Detroit**, MI: The City Council previously passed a unanimous resolution in support of the bill back in 2025, and continues to be a stronghold for the movement.

These local actions add grassroots pressure to federal lawmakers, showing that constituents across the country care about this issue.

New Battles Emerge: Protecting Musicians from AI

While we've been focused on AMFA and LWMA, a new front has opened up: ***artificial intelligence***. In the past month, there have been significant developments on three major AI-related bills:

- **NO FAKES Act**: This bill would create a federal right protecting a person's voice, image, and likeness from unauthorized AI-generated "deepfakes". On April 22, 2026, Senators Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) held a roundtable with more than 20 artists on Capitol Hill to discuss this legislation.
- **TRAIN Act**: The Transparency and Responsibility for Artificial Intelligence Networks Act would give copyright holders access to training records used for AI models, allowing them to see if their work was used without consent.
- **CLEAR Act**: Details are still emerging, but this bill is part of a trio of AI-focused legislation being prioritized by the Recording Academy.

These bills address the growing threat AI poses to musicians' livelihoods, and they deserve our attention alongside AMFA and LWMA.

A New Voice in the Fight: The Protect Working Musicians Act

There's another bill quietly making its way through Congress that could be a game-changer for independent artists: the **Protect Working Musicians Act (PWMA)**. (Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word congress for a free Summit Raffle Ticket) This legislation would give independent musicians and small labels a limited exemption from antitrust laws, allowing them to collectively negotiate with major streaming platforms and AI developers for fair compensation. This would be a ***significant shift in power***, leveling the playing field for artists who currently have no bargaining power.

Share Your Story

But we know there are more stories out there.

What have *you* done to advocate for fair pay in the past two months?

- Did you call or email your **Congressional Representative**?
- Did you call or email your **ISSA Representative**?
- Did you join a rally or town hall?
- Did you write an op-ed for your local paper?
- Did you simply share information on social media?
- **ISSA Representatives**, have you reached out to ISSA members in your area?

Send your story to me, Todd Apfel, at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com. We will feature the best and most inspiring stories in our next issue.

Your Voice is a Powerful Instrument

The fight for fair pay is far from over, but the past month has proven that when musicians organize, lawmakers listen. Let’s keep the momentum going. Whether it’s a phone call, a city council resolution, or a Capitol Hill visit from a Grammy winner, every action matters.

Stay tuned to the ISSA Summit Newsletter for more updates and coordinated action dates.

Keep writing. Keep advocating. And never stop playing.

CONGRATULATIONS to the 2026 ISSA Awards Finalists!



Today, we celebrate more than just nominations… we celebrate passion, dedication, late nights, brave hearts, and the beautiful courage it takes to share your music with the world.

Each of you has poured a piece of your soul into your craft, and it shows in every note, every lyric, every performance. Being named a finalist is not just an achievement — it's a reflection of your talent, your perseverance, and the light you bring to others through your artistry.

No matter what happens next, please know this: you've already made an impact. You've inspired. You've connected. You've created something meaningful — and that is something truly special.
We are so proud of you. Keep shining, keep believing, and keep making the world more beautiful with your music.

We hope to see your smiling faces on the red carpet in Atlanta this August — celebrating together, sharing the moment, and making unforgettable memories.



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*

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

Last month we announced the speakers for the 2026 ISSA Summit Breakout Sessions. Starting this month, we are spotlighting our presenters and a brief breakdown of their presentations.

Finding Your Frequency: Building an Authentic Musical Identity While Managing Mental Illness

2026 ISSA Summit Sneak Peek | Breakout Session Spotlight

Friday, August 21 – Opening Session

There is an old rule in the music industry: find your sound, build your brand, and stay consistent. But what happens when the person behind the sound doesn't *feel* consistent? What happens when anxiety, depression, neurodivergence, or recovery shifts the ground beneath your feet every single day?

For the team at **Unlikely Places Radio**, that question isn't theoretical. It is the heart of their work.

We are thrilled to announce that **Unlikely Places Radio** will lead off our Friday, August 21st Summit session with a powerful and necessary breakout presentation:

"Building an Identity in Music While Managing Mental Illness."

In an era where artists are pressured to perform polish 24/7, this session offers a radical alternative: honesty.

More Than a Radio Show

If you aren't familiar with them yet, **Unlikely Places Radio** is not your standard media outlet. It is a community built on the belief that your struggle does not disqualify your art—it deepens it.

The team brings a stunning range of lived experience and professional expertise to the Summit stage:

- **J.Edmond (Jeremy "J" Edmond)** – A 25' ISSA Award Finalist in seven categories and 26' nominee in nine, J.Edmond is a singer-songwriter signed with OOB Records. His upcoming album, *"Dear Therapist, What's Eating J.Edmond?"* is a raw exploration of his life with Autism, ADHD, and PTSD. Currently pursuing marketing at SNHU (after being accepted to Berklee!), J. understands the intersection of creativity and logistics. He is also authoring a fantasy novel and an autobiography about his mental health journey.
- **David Skaff** – The co-host and co-producer brings over 40 years of live event technical production and a BA in Telecommunications from Fresno State. He provides the structural backbone that allows creative vulnerability to actually *work* on air.
- **Matthew Graham** – An editor, co-host, singer, and guitarist with degrees in music and communications. Matthew met Jeremy during an online open mic during COVID—proof that unlikely places really do create the best connections.
- **Kyle Criscuolo** – A freelance multimedia specialist and current student at Hofstra University. Kyle joined as a social media assistant in early 2026 and now serves as a reporter for the segment 'Now Touring' and assistant production manager.

Together, they represent the full ecosystem of the working artist: the dreamer, the technician, the editor, and the strategist.

What You Will Actually Learn

This is not a lecture about "fixing" yourself to fit the industry. Instead, the Unlikely Places team will guide attendees through a compassionate, actionable blueprint for longevity.

You will leave with strategies for:

- **Separating your self-worth from your output.** (You are still an artist on the days you cannot write.)
- **Building a recognizable identity during periods of instability.** (How to show up when you're in recovery or survival mode.)
- **Using radio and media to humanize yourself.** (Moving beyond the polished persona to connect deeply with fans.)
- **Practical mental health tools.** (How to balance ambition with the very real need for rest and regulation.)

Reframing the Narrative

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this session is the removal of the word "limitation."

"Rather than framing mental illness as a limitation," the team writes in their abstract, *"this session reframes it as part of the artist's lived experience—one that, when supported properly, can deepen connection, resilience, and artistic impact."*
If you have ever felt like your brain works "too fast" or "too slow" for the tour bus… if you have ever cancelled a session because the anxiety was too loud… or if you simply want to learn how to support the brilliant, struggling artists in your circle—**you cannot miss this session.**

Join Us in August

The 2026 ISSA Summit is where songwriters go to grow. And this year, we start Friday morning with a truth bomb wrapped in a hug.

Come hear from **Unlikely Places Radio**. Leave with the tools to build a career that can survive—and thrive—alongside your humanity.

The Rick Spins Show News

Season 4 Battle of the #1's Kicks Off This Month



We're excited to announce the start of **Season 4 of the Battle of the #1's**. This thrilling competition features **21 outstanding artists** who have each claimed the #1 spot on the *Rick Spins Thursday Night Top 15 Show*.

Tune in to **ISSA Radio** starting **Thursday, May 13th**, as these talented musicians battle it out over the coming weeks to determine who will be crowned the Season 4 Champion.

Schedule Note & Vacation Break

Please note that Rick will be on vacation. During the week of **May 3rd – May 8th**, the show will post "best of" clips on Rick's TikTok page: https://www.tiktok.com/@issa.rick.spins

If you are submitting music to the *Rick Spins Show* at **ISSARadio.Rick@gmail.com** while Rick is away, please be patient.

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 week is about **ASKING PEOPLE TO LISTEN TO YOUR MUSIC.**

As I scroll around Facebook, I routinely see folks asking people to listen to their music with a statement just like this: "Hey check out my new single".
And that's it! When I see this, I am sorry but it's a quick PASS!
Why?
Chances are I have NO idea who you are, what kind of music you make, what this song is about, etc...so without ANY information you are asking me to "take action" by clicking around your post to listen to something. Most likely, I must leave whatever platform I am on and go to Spotify, iTunes, etc...
We are all trying to increase our reach, develop new audiences, and get heard so if someone can't take 60 sec to give me a reason to listen, then I probably won't take 60 sec to click around. Help me help you! FYI, if I am already a fan, I will click!

Here is an example post from my release "Soulfully Appreciating":

"Hey family, check out my Beatles inspired pop rock tune "Soulfully Appreciating" which discusses how we must:
• Find our path in life
• Follow it faithfully
• Fill our heart with love
• Feel the DIVINE!

Conceived and written amidst the vibrant tapestry of Rishikesh, India – the Beatles' famed spiritual haven – 'Soulfully Appreciating' reflects the wisdom shared during countless sunset dialogues with local artisans, business owners, holy men, and intrepid travelers."

I was told once to create some posts as if nobody knows you (I am trying to improve as well).

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

🙏



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.

Promoting *The Alchemy of a Song*

A song's alchemy doesn't live in the clinical precision of a chord change or the ink bled onto a midnight page, although this is the beginning of its birth.
The real magic is the moment something invisible (your song) finds a witness.
A song begins as a private language.
A feeling too slippery to hold, too heavy to ignore.

Maybe it's a memory, maybe it's a wound, maybe it's joy that refuses to sit still.
But when it's shaped into melody and released, something happens... ***it stops belonging to the one who created it***.

It's not just yours anymore; it finds new homes... new hearts.

- In the quiet drive of someone who needed to hear exactly that line.
- In the crowded room where strangers sing it back like they've known it forever.
- In the headphones of someone who finally feels understood.

That’s the transformation... the magic... that’s the ***alchemy***.
A song is no longer just sound... it becomes a bridge -

- Between people who have never met.
- Between versions of ourselves we barely recognize.
- Between what we feel and what we can finally say out loud.

And the pure connection grows into a full-circle miracle—coming back to you in the moment you realize your song returns to teach you how it knew them before you ever did.

It’s magic, sure... but not just the kind you make...
..its the kind you witness!

As a promoter, this is where my heart beats. When you hand me your "baby," you are handing me a private language—that piece of your soul you finally felt brave enough to share.

I carry a deep respect for the courage it takes to let go of what you’ve created.

It is the greatest honor of my professional life to take that magic and offer it every opportunity and every open door I can find. It is a tremendous responsibility that often feels like the weight of the world, but it’s a weight I’m proud to carry. Because once that bridge is built, I get to watch your song find its way home.

The Big Question: ***When do you need a Promoter?***

I am often asked, "Angela, when is it time to bring in a promoter, and how on earth do I find the right one?”

The truth is, you need a promoter when your song is ready to cross that bridge, but you need a partner to help pave the way. But don’t just hire a resume or a list of contacts.
How do you find the right one? ***You hire the person who feels exactly the way I described above about your music.***

Look for the witness who treats your "baby" with exact cautionary reverence.

Find the professional who doesn't just see a product, but feels the literal weight of the world when they carry your story into the light.

You need someone who will protect your song with everything they have while searching for the right opportunities that are perfect for you and your song.

There is no exact equation that works for any two songs, and no single strategy works for two different people.

The relentless pursuit of the path that fits your specific music takes persistence and a deep personal investment. If you are just one of many artists in a massive machine, it's fair to question how your story is being carried—and where your song is truly being heard.

The secret sauce?

Locate someone as invested in your song's success as you are.

Looking forward to seeing you all in Atlanta and until August...
Keep creating, keep connecting, and keep contributing.

Your friend,
Ang



ISSA Featured Artist of the Month

Congratulations to Chad Rivette - The ISSA FEATURED ARTIST for May

Chad's music is a blend of traditional country sounds and modern storytelling. His songs are characterized by their emotional depth, intricate guitar work, and his distinctive, soulful voice. Influenced by the likes of his Father Frank Rivette, a well know Musician for over 45 years. Chad's music stays true to the roots of country while also bringing a fresh, contemporary edge.

His songwriting is deeply rooted in his experiences growing up in Cornwall, reflecting the joys, sorrows, and simplicity of small-town life. His honest lyrics and authentic sound resonates with country music fans, creating a loyal fan base that grows with each performance.

As Chad Rivette continues to write and perform, his influence in the country music scene grows stronger. With his down-to-earth personality, relatable lyrics, and undeniable talent, Chad is not just a singer but a storyteller, capturing the essence of life's ups and downs through his music. His journey is a testament to the power of hard work, passion, and staying true to one's roots.

NOT JUST A GUITAR. A ONE-OF-A-KIND WORKING ART



Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars –
Handcrafted for the Rebel Spirit

Every musician remembers the first time they picked up an instrument that felt *alive*. Full of soul. Something nobody else in the world owns.

That is the magic of a **Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitar**.

Born in the workshop and built for the stage, each Stogie Joe guitar is a completely unique, handcrafted instrument. It starts with a classic cigar box—rich with history—and marry it to a hard maple neck, hand-carved with a classic "C" profile and a traditional headstock. Sealed tuners keep you locked in, while fretboards of walnut, Bolivian rosewood, padauk, wenge, or purpleheart provide a silky, fast feel.

Built for Tone, Not Gimmicks.

Stogie Joe Guitars are traditional 3 and 4-string boxes tuned to open G, open E, or open D. Fitted with medium/medium nickel-silver frets and a jumbo zero fret for effortless action.

But the secret is in the electronics. They prefer humbucker pickups (dual blade or traditional) because a pickup sounds its best with as few items between the output jack and the amp. That is why their guitars have just one thing: **A volume knob.** Pure. Raw. Unfiltered.

Easy to Learn. Impossible to Put Down.

Whether you are a beginner looking for a fun entry point or a seasoned pro wanting a new voice, cigar box guitars are surprisingly easy to play. They force you to stop overthinking and start *feeling*.

WIN A STOGIE JOE CIGAR BOX GUITAR (Yes, you.)

Thanks to the generosity of Stogie Joe, one lucky attendee will take home a handcrafted Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitar from the **2026 ISSA Summit in Atlanta this August!**

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



Music Industry News!

News From Around The World That Affects All Of Us

Spotify's New Blueprint: "Slow & Legal" PLUS a "Verified" Badge for Real Artists

If you've been following the AI music explosion, you've likely felt a knot in your stomach. Another wave of computer-generated songs, another royalty check diluted. But two recent developments from Spotify—one about their core philosophy, one announced just today—might actually matter to you as an indie artist.

First came a powerful quote from Spotify co-CEO Gustav Söderström:

"As a company, we've made the choice to do this the legal and right way, and that has some big consequences. It means we're slower…" — Gustav Söderström, Spotify

Then on April 30th, Spotify announced the **"Verified by Spotify"** badge, stating that AI-generated artists and personas are **not eligible for verification**.

Let's cut through the noise and show you exactly what these two moves mean for ISSA members who are fighting to protect their work.

The "Fast & Reckless" Path (Most AI Music Companies)

Dozens of AI music generators (Suno, Udio, and others) have been trained by gobbling up millions of copyrighted songs without asking permission or paying a dime. That's why they move fast—they simply ignore the "rights regime" (licenses, royalties, artist consent). This has led to massive lawsuits from major labels.

Spotify's "Slow & Legal" Path (Licensing)

Spotify is trying a different route. Instead of building AI models on stolen music, they want to **license** songs up front—paying rights holders before any AI tool launches. That means:
• They have to negotiate with labels, publishers, and collecting societies.
• They have to build tools that respect copyright (e.g., authorized remixes, not fake "original" AI songs).
All of that takes time. Hence, "slower."

NEW (April 30th): The "Verified by Spotify" Badge (Human-First)

This is the headline. Today (April 30th), Spotify announced a new verification badge with a **light green checkmark**, stating that profiles that appear to primarily represent AI-generated or AI-persona artists are **not eligible for verification** at launch.

To earn this badge, real artists must demonstrate:
• **Consistent listener activity** over time
• **Good standing** with Spotify's policies
• **Signals of a real artist presence** both on and off the platform (concert dates, merch, linked social accounts)

Spotify says that at launch, more than **99% of the artists listeners actively search for will be verified**—and the majority of those are independent artists.

This is a direct, visible weapon against the flood of low-quality "AI slop."

What Spotify Is *Not* Doing (Good news for indies)

• **No "ghost music"** – Spotify says it won't fill its own playlists with cheap, royalty-free AI tracks.
• **Cracking down on spam** – They've already removed over 75 million spammy tracks in the last year.
• **Artist Profile Protection** – A tool that lets you approve or block any upload that tries to land on your artist page. This is a direct weapon against impersonators and deepfakes.

The Tricky Part for Indie Artists (Still Very Real)

Even with today's (April 30th) news, real concerns remain:
• **The two-tier system** – Spotify's AI licensing deals will likely favor major labels first. That means AI-generated versions of Taylor Swift songs could become legal and promoted, while your original songs may not get similar upfront protection.
• **The "slop" flood** – Despite removal efforts, AI spam is still leaking through. Rival service Deezer estimates that up to 85% of AI music streams may be fraudulent—and every one of those streams pulls money from the same royalty pool you depend on.
• **The badge isn't perfect** – It explicitly excludes AI artists *at launch*, but Spotify has left the door open to verifying them in the future, saying "*the concept of artist authenticity is complex and quickly evolving.*" Will the badge still mean something a year from now?

What Does This Mean for YOU, an ISSA Member?

Good News
• You now have a **visible badge** that tells fans you are a real, touring, merchandise-selling human artist.
• Spotify is publicly stating that AI artists are *not* getting the same stamp of approval.
• The verification criteria (consistent listeners, off-platform presence) play to the strengths of career artists—not viral one-hit wonders.

Better News
• Apply for the badge immediately. Update your artist profile with links to your tour dates, merch store, and social accounts. Start building consistent listening patterns now.
• The verification badge is **free**, open to independents, and rolling out over the coming weeks. Don't get left behind.

Reality Check
• The badge does not solve the **royalty dilution problem**. AI spam can still pump millions of streams, even if its artists aren't verified.
• It also does not fix the **licensing two-tier system**. Big labels will still dominate AI royalty deals unless indies organize and demand a seat at the table.

The Bottom Line

Spotify is trying to be the "good citizen" of AI music on *two fronts*: licensing content "slow & legal" and giving listeners a tool to find real human artists. For indie artists fighting the AI tide, that's better than a wild west where anyone can steal your voice for free. But it's not a complete victory.

The real fight remains: **making sure that every licensed AI deal includes indies, not just major stars**. Until that happens, the verification badge is your best shield—so claim it, use it, and keep building the real-world presence that no AI can fake.

ISSA will continue to watch these developments and advocate for fair treatment of all songwriters—not just the ones with platinum records.

Editor's Note (April 30, 2026)

This article has been updated to reflect Spotify's new "Verified by Spotify" badge, announced today. The original article focused exclusively on Spotify's licensing strategy (the "slow & legal" path). That analysis remains accurate, but it did not account for today's announcement that AI-generated artists and AI personas are ineligible for verification—a significant new development in Spotify's approach to AI and artist authenticity.

Why we’re diving deep into the AI debate



For the independent singer-songwriter, the rise of artificial intelligence isn’t just a tech story—it is *the* story that will define the next decade of your career. Over the next few pages, we are dedicating significant space to this controversy not to fuel panic, but to cut through the noise. AI is already being used to generate lyrics, clone vocal inflections, and create "artist" collaborations without human performers. While this technology offers powerful tools for demoing or overcoming creative blocks, it also raises urgent questions about copyright, compensation, and the very definition of "original work."

Our members need to stay up to date because ignorance is no longer an option. Laws and streaming platform policies are changing rapidly, often driven by tech giants rather than artists. If you don’t understand how AI is scraping data, what your rights are regarding AI-generated covers of your songs, or how to spot potential infringement, you risk losing control of your legacy. This isn't about rejecting progress—it's about ensuring that the songwriter remains the heart of the song. Read on, stay curious, and most importantly, stay vocal.



ISSA Member Alert: 75,000 AI Songs *Per Day* – Here's What You Need to Do Now

One scary stat: Deezer just reported that **75,000 fully AI-generated tracks** are now uploaded to its platform **every single day** – that's over 2 million per month. AI music now makes up **44% of all new deliveries** on Deezer.

What that means for you: Your streaming royalties are being "diluted" (spread thinner) as AI tracks grab a larger slice of the same royalty pie. Plus, it's getting harder for fans to find your real, human-made music among the flood of synthetic noise.

But here's the good news: You can fight back – not with lawsuits, but with smart, human-first actions.

Your 3-Step Action Plan

1. Label yourself as HUMAN

When you upload through DistroKid, TuneCore, CD Baby, or any distributor, look for the checkbox that says *"This is 100% human-made"* (or similar). Check it. Every time.

2. Say NO to full AI songs

Using AI to write or perform entire songs might feel like a shortcut, but it hurts the whole indie community. If you use AI for anything (cover art, brainstorming), be transparent.

3. Tell your fans the truth

Add a 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 stat *is* scary – but it's also a wake-up call. **Your humanity is now your competitive advantage.** The platforms are starting to listen (Deezer has built an AI-detection tool). Now it's up to us to act.

Let's turn a scary stat into a concrete action plan. Forward this to a fellow ISSA member. Let's protect real music – together.

Next month we'll cover which streaming services are fighting AI fraud – and which ones to watch out for.

UMG Is Building an AI Patent Fortress — Here's What It Means for Independent Songwriters and Artists

UMG has been quietly building a major patent portfolio around AI music through a partnership with a company called Liquidax Capital and a new entity called Music IP Holdings (MIH). As of November 2025, MIH held more than 60 protected innovations, with more under development. Here's what's actually in those patents—and why it matters for indie artists like you.

What Are These Patents Really About?

UMG's approach centers on what industry experts call a **"walled garden"** model—a controlled environment where AI-generated songs stay inside the platform they were created on, and can't be downloaded or distributed elsewhere.

The patents cover technology that could:

- Require users to get permission from rights holders *before* an AI creates anything based on existing songs
- Keep AI-generated music locked inside the platform where it was made
- Track every use of a song in AI training
- Automatically flag and block unauthorized AI-generated derivatives

One patent filing even describes a “Copyright Licensing Chatbot” that would plug directly into AI tools like ChatGPT to handle rights clearance automatically before any AI creation happens.

How It Could Actually Work

If deployed, here's what the system might look like for a real-world scenario:

Traditional Approach (Today):
You post a song online → An AI company scrapes it without asking → The AI learns from your work → You never see a dime.

UMG's Patented System:
You (or your publisher) register your song in the system → The AI platform checks for permission before generating anything based on your work → If the AI wants to train on your song, it has to go through a licensing chatbot that negotiates terms → The system tracks every use and flags unauthorized outputs → You get paid when your work is legitimately used.

The AI would be required to: **Protection from unauthorized AI clones.** The patent filings explicitly include “AI threat protection”—meaning technology that can detect when AI systems are trying to mimic your voice or style without permission. The best way to think about this is like a **digital fingerprint** for your music that AI systems would have to check before generating anything in your style.

- **A seat at the table?** The fact that major labels see AI as a licensing opportunity rather than just a threat means there's an emerging market for your music in the AI world—if the systems are designed fairly.

1. **Check first** — Before generating anything from your song, it has to verify that you've allowed it
2. **Get permission** — It would have to secure the proper licenses through automated smart contracts
3. **Pay you** — Royalties would be tracked and distributed when your work is used in training or derivations

It's like having a **24/7 guardian** watching how your music is used and making sure you get paid.

How This Affects You — The Good, The Bad, and The Unknown

The Potential Upside

- **Your work could get tracked.** If your songs are registered in a system like this, you might actually get paid when AI companies use them for training, rather than just having your music scraped for free.
- **Protection from unauthorized AI clones.** The patent filings explicitly include “AI threat protection”—meaning technology that can detect when AI systems are trying to mimic your voice or style without permission. The best way to think about this is like a **digital fingerprint** for your music that AI systems would have to check before generating anything in your style.
- **A seat at the table?** The fact that major labels see AI as a licensing opportunity rather than just a threat means there's an emerging market for your music in the AI world—if the systems are designed fairly.

The Concerns You Should Watch For

- **The “walled garden” could become a pay-to-play system.** Songs that aren't registered or owned by major labels could be locked out of the AI ecosystem entirely, while those inside get all the opportunities.
- **This isn't designed for you—it's designed for UMG.** The technology is being built to serve Universal's catalog first. Independent artists are an afterthought unless they proactively take action with the right partners.
- **History could repeat itself.** The European Composer and Songwriter Alliance has warned that major labels risk creating the same problems with AI that streaming created—where labels get favorable terms and artists get less than 10% of the revenue.
- **Transparency is almost nonexistent.** Neither UMG nor MIH has publicly disclosed how these patents will be licensed or who will have access.

What You Can Do Right Now

Get Registered with Your PRO

ASCAP, BMI, and SOCAN have announced they now accept registration for **partially AI-generated** works (those combining AI tools with human creativity), but completely AI-generated music is not eligible for registration. If you're using AI as part of your creative process, make sure your PRO knows what's human and what's AI.

Understand Your Rights

The ELVIS Act in Tennessee and various lawsuits against AI companies are testing whether AI training on copyrighted music qualifies as “fair use.” Independent artists have been among the most vocal in pursuing these cases—including country singer Tony Justice, who sued Udio on behalf of indie artists, arguing that independent artists' rights “have been trampled the most”.

Consider Working With an Intellectual Property Attorney

If you can afford it, an attorney can help you:

- Determine whether your existing catalog has already been used to train AI models (many have—often without permission)
- Register your music with emerging AI licensing systems as they develop
- Ensure you're positioned to collect royalties when AI companies eventually need to license your work legally

Stay Informed and Stay Vocal

The rules for AI and music are being written ***right now***. Independent voices have already shaped this conversation—for example, the class action lawsuits filed by independent artists against Udio and Suno have forced AI companies to admit what they trained on and begin negotiating licenses.

The question isn't whether AI will be part of music's future. The question is **who gets paid, who gets left out, and who writes the rules.**

UMG is writing a blueprint. Make sure you have a say in how it's built—or that you're ready to build your own.



Major Distributor Blocks "Pirate AI" Music – What You Need to Know

A recent industry move could affect how your AI-assisted music reaches streaming platforms. Here's the breakdown.

You may have heard about AI music generators like Suno, Udio, or ElevenLabs. These tools can create vocals, instrumentals, or entire songs from text prompts. But a major shift just happened that every ISSA member should understand.

What's happening?

Believe (one of the world's largest independent music distributors, which also owns **TuneCore** – a popular platform for self-releasing artists) has announced two major changes:

1. They are now automatically BLOCKING any AI-generated tracks made on what they call "pirate studios" – specifically naming **Suno** as an example. ***They've deployed detection technology that can identify which AI model created a song with "99% reliability."***

2. At the same time, they have SIGNED LICENSING DEALS with two other AI companies: **ElevenLabs** and **Udio** – meaning those are now "approved" partners.

Why does this matter to ISSA artists?

If you use unlicensed AI tools (like Suno) to create any part of your music – lyrics, melody, vocals, or production – **TuneCore and Believe could block that track from ever reaching Spotify, Apple Music, or other streaming services.**

The company is also urging all streaming platforms to adopt similar detection tools. This could become an industry-wide standard.

What's the difference between "pirate studios" and licensed ones?

The key issue is **copyright and training data**.

- **Unlicensed AI tools** (Suno, at present) trained their AI on massive amounts of copyrighted music without permission from the original artists or labels. Believe calls these "pirate studios" and considers any music made with them to be illegal.
- **Licensed tools** (ElevenLabs, Udio) have signed formal agreements with music companies, meaning they've secured rights to use protected music in their AI training.

What should you do?

- **Before using any AI music generator**, ask: "Has this company licensed the music they trained on?" If you can't find a clear answer, proceed with extreme caution.
- **Be aware that even partial use** – for example, generating a drum track or a vocal melody through an unlicensed tool – could trigger detection and blocking.
- **Read your distributor's AI policy carefully.** TuneCore is just the first. Others (CD Baby, DistroKid, etc.) may follow.

The bottom line

This isn't an anti-AI stance – Believe is actively partnering with licensed AI companies. But they are drawing a hard line **against unlicensed AI**. For ISSA members, the message is clear: **where your AI-generated content comes from now matters as much as the content itself.**

When in doubt, disclose your AI use to your distributor before releasing. The rules are changing fast, and staying informed is your best protection.

Sync Licensing: A Lucrative (and Accessible) Opportunity for Indie Artists

This is a follow up to last month's article on Sync Licensing as there are so many opportunities now available to Indie Artists.



What Is Sync Licensing?

Sync licensing grants permission to pair your music with visual media—TV, film, video games, commercials, online content, and more. You earn an **upfront sync fee** plus **ongoing performance royalties** whenever the content airs publicly.

Why Indie Artists Have an Edge

- **Income:** Upfront fees + backend royalties can far exceed streaming revenue.
- **Exposure:** One placement can introduce your music to millions of new listeners.
- **Advantage:** Owning both your masters and publishing rights makes you a "one-stop shop"—music supervisors can clear your music faster, with fewer delays.

Typical Sync Fee Ranges

Placement Type	Typical Fee
Student/low-budget films	$0 – $500
YouTube (mid-size)	$100 – $1,000
TV (cable/streaming, background)	$2,000 – $15,000
National TV ad	$10,000 – $100,000+
Video games (non-featured)	$1,500 – $10,000
Major film	$5,000 – $50,000+

*Many first-time indie placements land in the **$500–$5,000** range—enough to outperform months of streaming revenue.*

Top Platforms for Indie Sync Opportunities

- **Music Gateway** – Works with DreamWorks, Disney, Universal; pays 75–80% of profits; you keep 100% of backend royalties.
- **PremiumBeat** – Subscription-based; covers web, TV, radio, apps, and film.
- **BeatStars** – Marketplace for instrumentals and production beats; strong payout history.
- **UnitedMasters SELECT** – Distributes to sync opportunities and brand deals (NBA, ESPN, Bose).
- **Orion Promotion** – Indie-focused submission tools and guidance.
- **Blakmarigold** – Lists 18 sync companies plus pitch workflows and readiness checklists.
- **The Sync Opps on Patreon** – Ongoing opportunities via patreon.com/thesyncopps

Quick Tips for Success

1. **Prepare your catalog** – Clean, mastered, sync-ready tracks only.
2. **Target the right placements** – Match genre and mood to the project's tone.
3. **Use multiple channels** – Platforms + direct pitches to music supervisors + follow-ups.
4. **Track your royalties** – Register with a PRO (ASCAP, BMI, SESAC).

Ready to start? UnitedMasters SELECT and Music Gateway handle distribution and submissions. Orion Promotion and Blakmarigold offer deeper pitch strategies.

Are Your Music Distributors Quietly Owning Your Future?



If you're not your own record label, what are you even doing?

That's the question every independent artist needs to ask. On a recent deep dive from the *Top Music Attorney Podcast*. Entertainment attorney Miss Krystle pulled back the curtain on music distributors (DistroKid, Landr, CD Baby, TuneCore, Symphonic, etc.)—and what she found is a little unsettling.

Here's the short version:

- **You might be training AI for free.** Some distributors are quietly adding clauses that let them use your music to train AI models. No extra payment. No permission slip.
- **Your "all-in-one" deal isn't all-in-one.** Things like YouTube Content ID (which actually earns you ad money) are often upsells. Features that should be standard become paid extras.
- **The fine print is intentionally confusing.** One distributor was caught showing artists one thing while the legal agreement said another. When called out, their explanation only made things messier.

This isn't a one-off mistake. It's how the system works when terms are buried, settings are pre-checked, and contracts are written to protect the platform—not you.

So what does “be your own record label” actually mean?

It means you stop thinking like a hobbyist and start thinking like a business.

- You are the one who reads (or has someone read) every contract before clicking “agree.”
- You hire distributors as service providers, not bosses. They work for you.
- You own your masters, your royalties, and your rights—period.

The moment you treat your music career like a real independent label, you stop being surprised by fine print. (Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word label for a free Summit Raffle Ticket) You start asking: *What am I actually agreeing to? And who really benefits here?*

Bottom line: Distributors are necessary. Blind trust in them is not.

Before your next release, take 20 minutes to reread your distributor’s terms. Look for “AI,” “machine learning,” “licensing,” and “third-party use.” If it’s vague or one-sided, ask questions—or start shopping for a distributor that respects your ownership.

Stay smart, stay independent, and keep building your label—one song at a time.



From the Listeners of ISSA Rick Spins Radio

Does Rick allow AI music? Absolutely not. Our listeners value authentic human artistry, and Rick has made it clear that AI-generated songs have no place on his show.

How do we detect AI music? We currently run every submission through two of the latest AI detection software tools. But let’s be honest—AI music and detection methods change daily, and the software isn’t cheap. So we go further: we have an internal checklist of additional checks (details we keep under wraps), we talk with other stations about who’s submitting AI tracks, and most importantly, we trust our ears. There are definite, telltale signs you can hear in an AI song. If it sounds fake, it’s out.

If you have question on what may trigger your song as AI, go to the article on page 47 titled “The AI Spectrum”.



The Summit Artist Spotlight for May - Birdy Young

Birdy Young carries a remarkable story. From a small Iowa town to the main stage, her journey has come with real grit, a few unexpected turns, and a whole lot of heart. Here's a closer look at the voice and vision behind the buzz.

Meet Birdy Young: The Heart Behind Hideaway Honey

Birdy Young is an award-winning singer-songwriter and Nashville recording artist from a small town in Central Iowa, but her journey to the stage has been anything but ordinary. She also happens to be one of the hardest-working artists in independent music today.

Her story begins at just 17 years old, sneaking into bars and clubs to sing karaoke. That initial spark of courage led her to Nashville, where she recorded her debut album at 19 with legendary producer Richard Donahue. Despite being turned away from Music Row for not fitting the industry's conventional "look," Birdy refused to give up.



A Moment That Changed Everything

In 2017, Birdy and her family were involved in a fatal truck and horse trailer rollover accident that left her facing daily physical, emotional, and mental challenges. “Life hasn’t been easy,” she shares. But through it all, she discovered the power of songwriting in 2020, using poetry and music to navigate her new reality. Today, her music and her message of resilience continue to inspire audiences everywhere.

Recent Highlights & Accolades

Birdy’s hard work and authenticity have earned her well-deserved recognition in the independent music community. Her recent accomplishments include:

- **2025 ISSA Female Album of the Year – Silver Winner** for her acclaimed project *Wild Child*
- **2025 ISSA International Awards Finalist in 3 categories**: Female Emerging Artist of the Year, Female Album of the Year, and Band of the Year
- **2025 ISSA Nomination in 8 categories**
- **2024 Iowa Music Awards – Female Vocalist of the Year Nominee**

Her music has also found success on the radio charts, with “Wild Child” hitting No. 1 on *The Rick Spins Show* and “Gettin’ Lazy” claiming the No. 1 spot on ISSA Radio in Atlanta.

Bringing the Buzz to Every Stage

As the creative force behind Hideaway Honey, Birdy Young delivers high-energy, jukebox-style performances that cover everything from classic country to nostalgic rock, 2000s pop, and heartfelt original music. And she doesn't just perform—she connects. During the week, you’ll find her lifting spirits in senior living communities and veterans’ homes across Iowa.

“There’s nothing more fulfilling than bringing back a memory through music,” Birdy says. She doesn't just perform—she celebrates the songs and artists that have helped shape who she is today.

She also adds a little fun along the way, and each January you might even catch her channeling Elvis Presley in a special tribute performance for residents.



Beyond the Music

When she’s not on stage or in the studio, Birdy enjoys life with her cat Demi and her horse, Sage. You’ll often find her traveling with family to PHBA and PTHA horse shows, fishing on the river with friends, and camping during the summer. By day, she also serves as an assistant for Tall Paul’s Equine Marketing.

What’s Next?

Forward-looking fans have a lot to be excited about. Birdy is currently putting the finishing touches on her next record, “Out in No-Man’s Land,” due out later in 2026.

Her Hideaway Honey band is booking dates and planning a tour for the summer. For her dedicated fans—affectionately known as “The HIVE”—things are just getting started.

"My motto this year is 'I can, and I will' — that night I proclaimed 'I DID.' Let my experience prove that you can too."

— Birdy Young, reflecting on her 2025 ISSA win - ***“Stay Connected”.*** Birdy will be performing on the Main Stage during the ISSA Awards Show this August in Atlanta, make sure you’re there to catch her act!

We are so proud to count Birdy Young among the winners and members of the International Singer Songwriters Association. Keep shining, Birdy, and we can’t wait to hear what you do next.

Find out more about Birdy Young & Hideaway Honey at www.hideawayhoney.com and be part of the buzz—it's just getting sweeter.

Have you checked out the ISSA Store lately?

There are a lot of cool new items, including:



ISSA Awards 2026 Tee Shirt



2026 ISSA Summit Tee Shirt

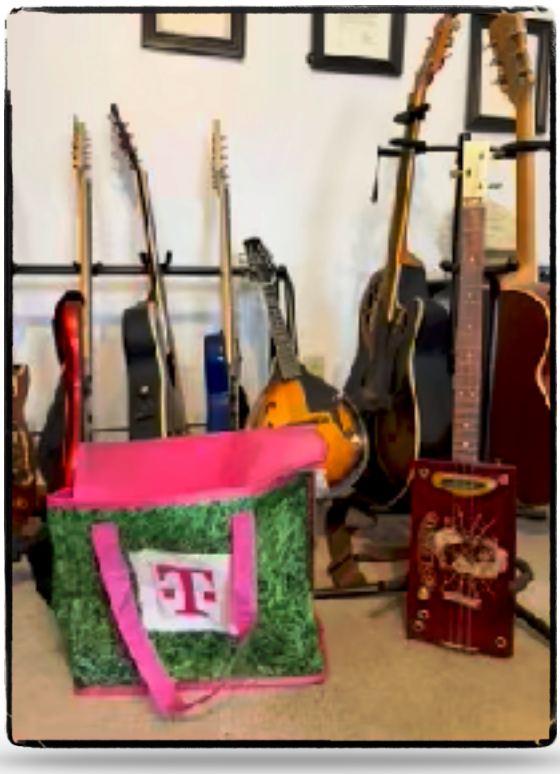


Embroidered 2026 Summit Cap

Make sure to go to the ISSA Store and add a few of these to your wardrobe. Just click on the link below and pick out something for yourself or your loved ones.

https://issasongwriters.com/store/

It Doesn't Hurt to Ask



Recently, my wife Jill and I made the switch to T-Mobile after our old carrier was bought out. The customer service was fantastic—but that's not what I want to share with you.

We walked out with two new phones, an iPad, and something unexpected: a cool thermal tote bag. On a whim, I jokingly asked the store manager, "Got 100 more of those? I'd love to hand them out as swag bags at our ISSA Summit."

He turned around, walked to the back, and came out with **two boxes**—100 bags. Just like that.

Now, I'll be honest: this was the exception, not the norm. Most businesses won't hand over 100 bags on the spot. But here's what this taught me:

1. It doesn't hurt to ask. The worst they can say is no. The best? You just filled your swag bags.

2. If you don't ask, you'll never know. That "no" you're afraid of? You're already living with it by staying silent.

So here's my challenge to every ISSA member: **start asking.** And don't limit yourself to music stores—think bigger. Local businesses budget for promo items all the time: pens, notepads, key chains, stress balls, caps, t-shirts, sweatshirts, koozies, stickers, coffee mugs, water bottles. Even cell phone carriers.

Thanks to T-Mobile, we've got large swag bags to fill. Now let's go fill them together.

Don't be afraid to ask. You might be surprised who says yes.

T-Mobile™

Thanks again to our new friends at T-Mobile!



2026 Summit Information

In last month's newsletter, we revealed the Speakers and their topics for this years Summit. We've been asked by 2 of the speakers (Linda Marks & Alan Garmonsway) to include the following requests for help with their Summit Sessions.

Mentoring At The 2026 ISSA Summit
by Linda Marks (**lsmheart@aol.com**)

One of the great gifts in a community of singer songwriters like ours is the abundance of skills and experience we bring individually and collectively. Being a singer songwriter is often a solitary experience, with so many aspects to our work it often feels overwhelming. No matter where we are in our music careers, having an opportunity to talk about skills, tools, experiences and to receive feedback from our fellow singer songwriters can be both supportive and helpful.

This year, we are building a mentoring segment into the ISSA Summit. In addition to a formal presentation on mentoring on Thursday afternoon, we 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.

Examples of topics you might wish to mentor or be mentored in include (but are not limited to):
*. Songwriting methods and techniques
*. Strategies for recording and releasing music
*. Arranging music
*. Feedback on songs in process
*. Best practices for social media marketing
*. Synch licensing
*. Booking gigs

*. Developing your brand
*. DIY recording
*. Self-care and mental health
*. Balancing your music career with family responsibilities
*. Awards contents
*. How, why and when to seek nomination to become a Voting Member of the Recording Academy
*. Promoting to radio

And if you would like to be mentored, we need to know what topics you would like to learn more about.

To apply to BE MENTORED or BE A MENTOR, please write to me at lsmheart@aol.com and tell me:

- If you want to be mentored, mentor or both?
- What topics are you interested in discussing as a mentor or as a mentee?
- Which days will you be at the ISSA Summit and Awards Show? (Thursday? Friday? Saturday?)

Please be sure to get your responses in by June 1st so I have time to put the session details together.

We hope many of you will choose to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from one another while in Atlanta.

Be a Judge on the Stage! Join our Summit Panel 🎶

By: Alan Garmonsway (**alan@garmonsway.com**)

We're looking for a few Gold Winners to join Alan Garmonsway for a special panel at the 2026 ISSA Summit on Friday, August 21.

This session is all about sharing your experience with the audience. It's a chance to discuss the art of judging: **what you look for** in a winning song, how you compare entries across genres, and the fun challenges that come with the role.

It will be a lively, insightful discussion (with a touch of humor!) leading into the Awards Ceremony.

Interested in being on the panel? Contact me soon! We want to ensure the panel represents the full diversity of our incredible ISSA community.

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 question has actually come from numerous ISSA members. ***What is considered AI, along with what is and isn't allowed for my song not to be flagged as an AI song?***

The AI Spectrum: A Survival Guide for the Independent Artist

Subtitle: What counts as AI, what doesn't, and how to keep your music (and copyright) safe.

If you are an independent artist in 2026, you are likely suffering from a bout of "AI Anxiety." You've heard the horror stories: Spotify removing AI-generated tracks, AI detectors flagging human vocals, and the looming fear that your laptop is about to replace your band.

But here is the truth the average musician doesn't know: **Not every digital tool is AI.**

There is a massive gray area between a classic drum machine and a generative lyric bot. If you don't know where that line is, you might accidentally flag your song as synthetic—or worse, lose your copyright.

Let's demystify the machine. Here is exactly what is AI, what isn't, and the checklist you need to save to your phone.

The Tool-by-Tool Guide: Breaking Down the Gear

Artists ask me every day if their favorite plugin is "cheating." Let's look at the specific tools on your hard drive.

1. Are Drum Machines Considered AI?

- **Verdict:** No (usually).
- **The Explanation:** A standard drum machine (like an old 808 or Logic's built-in drummer set to "manual") is just a sequencing tool. *You* tell it when to hit the snare.
- **The Red Line:** It becomes AI only when the machine uses *machine learning* to generate original patterns for you. If the box says "AI Drum Bot" or "Generative Rhythm," that's AI.

2. Is "Band in a Box" Considered AI?

- **Verdict:** It depends on which button you push.
- **The Explanation:** The core tech of Band in a Box (generating tracks from chord symbols) is decades old. For many pros, it's just a sophisticated auto-accompaniment.
- **The Red Line:** The *new* versions have AI lyric generators and stem-splitting. If you use **AI to write the words** or **AI to rip apart a song**, you are now in the AI zone.

3. Are Vocal Filters (Reverb/Delay) AI?

- **Verdict:** No.
- **The Explanation:** Reverb, distortion, and delay are standard effects. They are the paintbrush, not the painter.
- **The Red Line:** The line is crossed when an effect *adapts* to your mood or *generates* a harmony for you without your input. A reverb pedal is safe; an AI that listens to your voice and writes a counter-melody is not.

4. Is Melodyne (Pitch Correction) AI?

- **Verdict:** No, absolutely not.
- **The Explanation:** This is a crucial distinction. Melodyne uses advanced math (algorithmic analysis) to look at your audio. It does not "learn" from the internet, nor does it write anything new. It is a scalpel for your performance.
- **The Bottom Line:** Pitch correcting *your* voice is still *your* voice. AI would be generating a voice that never existed to sing a note you never hummed.

5. Is AI Mastering (LANDR, eMastered, Logic Pro Assistant) AI?

- **Verdict:** Yes. This is AI.
- **The Explanation:** These tools use machine learning. They analyzed thousands of hit songs to learn what "loud" and "clear" sound like.
- **Why it matters:** While you push the button, the algorithm is making creative decisions (EQ, compression) for you. **However**, the industry generally views mastering AI as "acceptable hygiene" because it doesn't change the melody, lyrics, or performance.

The "ISSA Check List": What IS AI?

Keep this table on your studio wall. If the tool does any of these things, it will likely flag as AI on detector software or metadata tags.

If the tool...	Example	Is it AI?
Generates lyrics or melody from a text prompt	ChatGPT, Suno, Udio	**YES (High Risk)**
Performs a vocal or instrument for you	AI Voice clones, Sample packs with AI vocals	**YES (High Risk)**
Learns from data to make a creative choice	AI Mastering, AI Chord Suggestions	**YES (Low/ Medium Risk)**
Separates vocals from stems (Demucs, RipX)	Stem Splitters	**YES (Medium Risk)**
Edits your existing pitch/timing	Melodyne, Auto-Tune (Manual mode)	**NO**
Plays a sound because you hit a MIDI key	Synthesizers, Drum Machines	**NO**
Adds reverb or EQ to your track	Standard effects plugins	**NO**

The Golden Rule: Intent & Copyright

Here is the most important paragraph you will read all year.

The industry does not hate AI. The industry hates *dishonesty* and *zero human input*.

- **The Bad:** If you ask a robot to write a song, sing the song, and master the song while you sit on the couch—that is not "creating music." Under current US Copyright law, that song belongs to **nobody**. It is public domain. You cannot sue someone who steals it.
- **The Good:** Using AI to plan your release strategy, generate social media captions, or map out a tour route? That is smart business. Using AI to master your track or clean up background noise? That is smart engineering.

The New Rule (DDEX & Spotify): Soon, you will have to check a box telling the world if you used AI. If you lie, streaming algorithms may demote you.

The Action Plan for your Copyright

To protect your song as a "Human Work," you need a paper trail.

1. **Save the Raw Takes:** Keep the scratch vocal where you cough. Keep the out-of-tune guitar take.
2. **Save the MIDI:** Prove you pressed the keys.
3. **Document the Process:** A voice memo of you humming the chorus into your phone is gold.

The Bottom Line: Use the machines to polish your *performance*, not replace it. A singer who uses AI to master their song is a pro. A singer who uses AI to sing the song is a manager, not an artist.

Stay human, ISSA. Keep writing.

Todd Apfel is an ISSA Director and independent artist dedicated to helping songwriters navigate the digital landscape without losing their soul (or their royalties). You can reach out to Todd at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with your questions.

One Community, One Stage, One Future



Hello ISSA Family,

If you've read my past articles, you know I usually spend this space trying to convince—maybe even push—everyone to step up, find sponsors, volunteer, and help make the Summit everything it can be. I'm a results-driven person. (And just so we're clear, that means I'm guided by outcomes, not just checking boxes. Goals, plans, timelines—that's how I roll.) Lately, the results haven't matched the effort, and I'll admit, my tone has reflected that frustration.

But not this month……

This month, I'm pressing pause on the pitch. Because honestly? There's too much good happening to let anything else steal the spotlight. So here's what I want to celebrate instead.

First and foremost—congratulations to every single 2026 ISSA Awards Show Finalist. That is a huge deal, and you should be incredibly proud. (And yes, there's an article inside this month with advice on how to make the most of being a finalist. Read it. Please.)

For those who didn't make the finalist list this year—don't you dare shut this newsletter. There's something in here for you too. Real, usable gold that can change your path forward.

We've got artists sharing what past Summits meant to them—their words, their hearts, their stories. Testimonials that remind us why we do this in the first place.

We're welcoming back AIAIAI Audio as a returning Summit partner. That's not just a sponsor—that's a family member coming home.

Chad Rivette has offered his karaoke setup for some courtyard fun. Yes, you read that right. Courtyard. Karaoke. Fun. We want to know your thoughts.

We're talking about real legislation moving through Congress—bills that could finally give musicians a fair living wage. Believe it or not, this affects you. Especially if you send your music to radio or streaming platforms. Don't sleep on this article.

Jeremy Edmund's breakout session at the 2026 Summit? We've got a sneak peek inside. Spoiler: you're going to want to take notes.

Michael Botte and Angela Marie Eidenmiller are back with their tips for ISSA artists. These two never miss—so neither should you.

Meet our May ISSA Artist of the Month: Chad Rivette. (Yes, the same Chad with the karaoke. The man stays busy.)

And let's give it up for Dave Plekkenpol from Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars—a great friend, sponsor, and partner with The Rick Spins Show and the ISSA Summit. Read about why he's a legend in our world.

Now flip over to the Music Industry News section, because wow:

- Four articles on what major players are doing about AI. (Read them. Seriously.)
- A follow-up on Sync Licensing and why you should absolutely be involved.
- An article about Music Distributors and what to watch out for. (LABELS—pay attention.)

More Summit goodness:

- Artist Spotlight: Birdy Young - Everything you wanted to know about her.
- Summit Swag Bags, donated by T-Mobile (yes, free stuff), how did it happen?
- Linda Marks and Alan Garmonsway have requests for help—let's show up for them!
- A must-read article on what is and isn't AI, and what will (and won't) trigger AI detection software.

Here's the truth: In ISSA, we are one community. We share one stage. And we have one future—together, as a musical family.

My hope—my genuine hope—is that everyone not only reads what's in these newsletters but actually takes advantage of the tips, the advice, the connections, and the opportunities. It's all here for you. Free. Every month.

One last thing: With the sheer amount of content we're packing into the newsletter each month, we're seriously considering moving to an online newsletter in the near future. More flexibility. More space. More of what you need. Stay tuned.

Thank you for being part of this family. Let's make 2026 our best year yet—not because I guilt you into it, but because we all choose to rise together.

Onward together,

Todd Apfel
Executive Director Corporate Development
ISSA





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.