

Countdown to Atlanta: The 10th Issue Summit Special

Welcome to the 10th Issue of the ISSA Summit Newsletter!

Can you feel the energy building? We are now **less than two months away** from the most anticipated event on the independent music calendar—the **2026 ISSA Awards Show & Summit**! As we kick off the first week of July, the excitement is palpable, and we're thrilled to bring you a very special double-feature edition of your newsletter.

PART ONE: The ISSA Summit Newsletter Special Edition

This year's Awards Show and Summit is shaping up to be our most spectacular gathering yet. Mark your calendars now—**Saturday, August 22nd** is the day when independent artists from around the globe will converge on Atlanta, Georgia, for an unforgettable celebration of songwriting excellence.

The prestigious event returns to the **Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center**, the very same venue that hosts the BMI Awards. And the celebration doesn't stop there! Join us for the **Pre-Party on Friday, August 21st** at 5pm at Wild Wing Cafe in Alpharetta, and keep the momentum going at the **After Party** immediately following the awards show.

What's Happening Right Now

Here's the inside scoop: **by now, all of our distinguished judges**—comprised of gold-level recipients from the past two years—have had the opportunity to review every finalist submission. They are in the final stages of deliberation, carefully considering the incredible talent that has emerged from over seventy thousand votes cast during the public voting period.

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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.

Our judges are getting ready to make their choices, and the anticipation is building toward that magical moment when winners will be revealed live on stage.

What to Expect in This Special Edition

This newsletter is uniquely structured to give you the full picture. **The first half** is dedicated entirely to your Summit and Awards Show experience—expect to find:

- **The full schedule of Summit speakers and their sessions**
- **Everything you need to know about this year's Awards Show**
- **Red carpet details** (interviews begin at Noon, ceremonies at 2pm!)
- **Performance highlights** and what to expect from our Main Stage and After Party acts

This is your one-stop guide to making the most of your ISSA Summit experience. Whether you're a finalist, a performer, a sponsor, or a passionate supporter of independent music, we've got you covered.

A Milestone Celebration

This year marks a significant milestone for the ISSA community. With over **thirty thousand members globally** and artists traveling from more than **40 countries** to attend, we've built something truly extraordinary. The ISSA Awards have been a pivotal event for advancing the careers of independent artists since the organization's inception in 2018, and this 10th issue of our newsletter celebrates that incredible journey.

PART TWO: The Indie Music Industry Pulse

Now, let's turn to the second half of our newsletter—because while we're counting down to Atlanta, the independent music industry continues to evolve at lightning speed. So much has happened in the past month that everyone needs to be aware of. The industry is changing daily, and staying informed is more critical than ever for independent artists.

Artist Compensation Battles Heat Up

Just last week, **Spotify was hit with a major lawsuit** from an independent musician and attorney alleging that the streaming giant's 1,000-play royalty threshold and stream-filtering policies have led to a "systemic suppression" of indie artist compensation. The lawsuit claims these practices "materially reduce compensation to small creators" through opaque rules and undisclosed filtering criteria.

This is a developing story that every independent artist should follow closely. The lawsuit specifically alleges that starting in March 2026, the plaintiff's songs saw a "sharp and measurable decline in counted streams, despite continued listener activity"—raising serious questions about how streaming platforms are counting (or not counting) our streams.

Legislative Victories on the Horizon

But there's good news too! The **Protect Working Musicians Act of 2026** was reintroduced in Congress on May 21st, and it's gaining serious momentum. This landmark legislation would allow independent musicians to **collectively negotiate** with both streaming platforms and AI developers for fair compensation. As Congresswoman Deborah Ross put it, this bill will "level the playing field" for indie artists who lack the same negotiating leverage as major labels.

The bill has already garnered wide support from organizations including the American Association of Independent Music, the Artist Rights Alliance, the National Music Publishers' Association, and SAG-AFTRA.

AI Legislation Taking Shape

Speaking of AI, the conversation is only getting louder. The **NO FAKES Act** was reintroduced in May with an even broader coalition of support—now including Spotify, joining UMG, Sony, Warner, Google, and OpenAI. This bipartisan bill would establish a federal right protecting a person's voice, image, and likeness from unauthorized AI-generated deepfakes.

Additionally, the **TRAIN Act** and **CLEAR Act** are being championed as part of a comprehensive approach to protecting music creators in the AI era. These bills would give creators visibility into whether their work was used to train AI systems and create accountability when work is used without consent.

Industry Innovations?

We're seeing what some say exciting, while others say disturbing developments for independent artists. **Suno recently launched "Spark,"** a new artist incubator program offering selected independent artists monetary grants, marketing support, and access to songwriting camps. Meanwhile, music company **Duetti is acquiring six-month-old songs and hiring indie artists to remix them**, creating new opportunities for artists to earn royalties.

Your Call to Action

As we count down to August 22nd, we encourage you to **dive into both halves of this newsletter**. Absorb everything the Summit has to offer, and stay sharp on the industry developments that affect your career.

Tickets are now available at www.ISSAsongwriters.com/tickets. Don't miss your chance to be part of history—this is going to be our most unforgettable event yet.

The 10th issue is here, the Summit is coming, and the future of independent music has never looked brighter. Let's make some noise together.

See you in Atlanta!

—The ISSA Team

P.S. Keep an eye on our social channels and website for real-time updates as we get closer to the big day!

ISSA Awards Show & Summit Week: Your Complete Schedule for Atlanta, August 20–22



The countdown is on. In just a few weeks, the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) will descend upon Atlanta for its **8th Annual Awards Show and Summit** —three days packed with education, networking, performance opportunities, and the kind of spontaneous camaraderie that only happens when songwriters gather in one place.

Whether you're attending to soak up wisdom from industry veterans, to perform on a showcase stage, or to walk the red carpet and celebrate your fellow artists, this is your roadmap to the entire weekend. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word "Wisdom" to receive a free "Summit Raffle Coupon".* Below is the full schedule of events. And in the pages that follow, we'll dive deep into each session so you can plan your experience with precision.

The Big Picture: What to Expect

The ISSA Summit kicks off Thursday morning with a full slate of educational sessions led by working professionals who know the music business from the inside out. Friday continues the learning with another full day capped off by a pre-party celebration. And Saturday? That's the main event—the red carpet, the awards show, and the after-party that will keep the energy going well into the night.

Throughout it all, you'll have the chance to connect with fellow songwriters, share stories, and maybe even write a few new songs together. The host hotel courtyard has become legendary for its late-night jam sessions and impromptu collaborations—expect the unexpected.

Thursday, August 20 — Summit Day One

The first day of the summit kicks off with opening remarks and a full schedule of sessions designed to give you actionable tools for your career.

Thursday is your chance to ease into the weekend, absorb knowledge from the day's presenters, and then let loose in the evening with karaoke and jams under the Atlanta sky. Chad Rivette will be keeping the energy high, so bring your beverage of choice and your vocal chops.

Time	Session
10:00 – 11:00	**Tamanie Dove** – Opening Remarks
11:15 – 12:15	**John Pineiro**
1:00 – 2:00	**Linda Marks**
2:15 – 3:15	**Special Session** (replacing Miranda Raine — details to be announced next month)
3:30 – ???	**Emily Finke**
7:00 – ???	**Karaoke & Live Jam Sessions** – Host hotel Courtyard, hosted by Chad Rivette

Friday, August 21 — Summit Day Two & Pre-Party

Friday brings another full day of sessions, anchored by a keynote address that you won't want to miss. Then, as the sun sets, the celebration begins.

Sam George's keynote from 1:00 to 3:00 is the centerpiece of Friday's programming—a rare opportunity to hear from one of the industry's respected voices. Afterward, the party shifts to Wild Wing Cafe in Alpharetta for the official ISSA Pre-Party. And if history is any guide, the fun will continue back at the hotel courtyard long into the night.

Time	Session
9:00 – 10:00	**Jeremy Edmond**
10:15 – 11:15	**Randie O'Neil & Emo LeBlanc**
11:30 – 12:30	**Alan Garmonsway**
1:00 – 3:00	**Sam George** – KEYNOTE SPEECH
5:00 – ???	**ISSA Pre-Party** – Wild Wing Cafe, Alpharetta, GA
??? – ???	**Impromptu fun and mayhem** – Host hotel Courtyard (Courtyard by Marriott)





Saturday, August 22 — Awards Show Day

This is the day everything builds toward. The red carpet. The awards. The celebration of songwriting excellence.

Saturday is all about celebration. Arrive early for the red carpet experience (noon–2:00 PM) at the beautiful Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, then settle in for the awards show from 2:00–5:00. After the final trophy is handed out, the party moves back to Wild Wing Cafe for the official after-party. And yes—the courtyard will once again be the site of late-night celebrations, jam sessions, and the kind of spontaneous magic that makes ISSA weekends unforgettable.

Time	Event
12:00 – 2:00	**2026 ISSA Awards Show Red Carpet Experience** – Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, Sandy Springs
2:00 – 5:00	**2026 ISSA Awards Show** – Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, Sandy Springs
5:00 – ???	**ISSA Awards Show After Party** – Wild Wing Cafe, Alpharetta, GA
??? – ???	**Fun and mayhem celebrating all the big wins** – Host hotel Courtyard



Bonus Opportunity: One-on-One Sessions with Alexx Antaeus



In addition to the main Summit schedule, we are absolutely thrilled to announce a game-changing opportunity for our attendees. Fresh off his electrifying keynote address last year, **Grammy® Award-Winning Producer Alexx Antaeus** (Antaeus Music Group / Monom Records) is returning to the ISSA Summit—and this time, he's getting personal.

Imagine sitting down, face-to-face, with a producer who has shaped the sound of multi-platinum records. Imagine having his undivided attention for a full 30 minutes to dissect your next single, fine-tune your production strategy, or map out a marketing plan that actually moves the needle. That dream is now a reality.



Alexx's passion for independent artists is legendary. If you were in the room for his keynote last year, you know he doesn't just talk about the industry; he gives you the blueprint to conquer it. He is a true friend to the indie community, and he has agreed to open his schedule for exclusive, private consultations.

This isn't a lecture. This is a **private masterclass** with a man who has the power to change the trajectory of your career.

Here's the deal:

- **Cost:** Only $50 (The single best investment you can make in your future).
- **IMPORTANT:** The $50 fee is not paid to Alexx Antaeus. Alexx is generously donating his time and expertise. All proceeds go directly to ISSA to help offset expenses associated with organizing and producing the 2026 ISSA Summit.
- **Availability:** Strictly limited to a handful of premium slots.
- **When:** Thursday & Friday of the Summit.

Do not sleep on this. These slots will vanish faster than you can hit "record." This is your chance to get insider feedback from a Grammy winner without the six-figure price tag.

To claim your spot, email Todd Apfel immediately at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com. Seriously. Do it now. This could be the $50 that changes everything.

What's Coming Next

Over the next few pages, we'll be including detailed information on **each of the sessions** available to you during Awards Weekend. You'll get to know each presenter, what they'll be covering, and why their expertise matters for your songwriting journey. Whether you're interested in the craft of writing, the business of publishing, or the art of performance, there's something here for everyone.

So mark your calendars, pack your notebooks (and your instruments), and get ready for three days of inspiration, education, and celebration. The 8th Annual ISSA Awards Show and Summit is almost here—and Atlanta is ready to welcome you.



Tamanie Dove's Opening Address – Expect the Expected, and Then Some

Thursday, August 20 - 10:00 AM

Mark your calendars and set your alarms—Thursday, August 20 at 10:00 AM is the moment the ISSA Summit truly comes alive. ISSA CEO and Founder Tamanie Dove will take the main stage to deliver her highly anticipated annual welcoming address, and if history is any indicator, attendees should buckle up for a ride that is equal parts practical wisdom and spontaneous inspiration.

The Official Agenda: "Social Media Hacks"

On paper, Tamanie's session is tailored to give your career a digital edge. She will be focusing on **"Social Media Hacks"**—actionable, street-smart strategies designed to help independent artists cut through the noise, build authentic audiences, and turn online engagement into real-world opportunities. For those looking to demystify algorithms and amplify their presence, this portion of her talk alone will be worth the price of admission.

The Curveball: Expect the Unexpected

However, as any veteran Summit attendee will tell you, Tamanie Dove never sticks strictly to the script. True to her past record at the Summit, you can expect this welcoming speech to **venture far beyond what is scheduled**. She has a well-earned reputation for throwing curveballs—whether that means pivoting mid-sentence to address a pressing industry topic that wasn't on the agenda, pulling an impromptu surprise guest onto the stage, or pausing to share a raw, unscripted story from her own journey that leaves the room hanging on every word. Her sessions are living, breathing experiences where the agenda is merely a starting point.

A Legacy of Grit and Grace

This willingness to break the mold is rooted in Tamanie's extraordinary background. Originally from Nashville and now based in Atlanta, she grew up backstage at the Grand Ole Opry. Her mother, the beloved Carole "Mama Dove," who worked at Tree Publishing (now Sony/Tree), introduced her to music royalty and instilled in her a lifelong philosophy of "paying it forward." Since losing her mother to Covid-19 in 2020, Tamanie has carried that guiding spirit into every aspect of ISSA, ensuring that the organization remains a fierce advocate for fairness, integrity, and professionalism on a global scale.

With over 100 original songs, 15 albums to her credit (many crafted alongside her son and sound engineer, Matt), and eleven years of relentless service to the independent community, Tamanie speaks not just as a CEO, but as a working artist who has lived the grind.

Why You Cannot Miss This

While you will certainly leave with a notebook full of actionable social media hacks, the true value of Tamanie's opening speech will be the unexpected moments—the detours, the passion, and the unfiltered truth that only someone with her depth of experience can deliver. She always struggles to keep her speeches within the prescribed time frame, and honestly, we wouldn't have it any other way.

Be in your seats at 10:00 AM on Thursday, August 20. This isn't just a welcome address; it's the heart of the Summit, and it is guaranteed to be a session you won't soon forget.

If you haven't done so already, reach out to Todd Apfel via email (issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com)to register for free to attend the Summit. If you do not register, we can't guarantee that there will be seats available.

Thursday, August 20 - 11:15 AM

John Pineiro will be taking the podium, you can find out more about his background and presentation in the June ISSA Summit Newsletter.

Thursday, August 20 - 1:00 PM



ISSA MENTORSHOP PROGRAM: My Vision and Why Mentorship Matters

By Linda Marks

I have been a professional musician for most of my adult life in two chapters, with a couple decades in between to raise my now young adult son as a single mom and care for my mom with Alzheimer's. I've released 16 studio albums with a 17th in the final stages of production for 2027 release. I've performed in hundreds of concerts in traditional and non-traditional venues, major venues and community settings, benefit concerts and ticketed events, solo, duo and with a band. I am proudly a Voting Member of the Recording Academy and curator of the ISSA Boston/Northeast Chapter.
Mentoring has been a central theme in my life: both mentoring and being mentored.

As an artist at all stages of my musical career, I have benefited from mentorship. At Yale, where I graduated with a degree in Music with Honors and Distinction as a self-taught, dyslexic, intuitive singer songwriter, Maury Yeston, the chair of the Music Department was a wonderful mentor, showing me what was possible as a songwriter (he was writing a musical while I was in school which went on to win a Tony Award). In my first chapter as a professional musician right after college, Ron Della Chiesa, a stellar DJ on the local NPR radio station invited me to share my music on his show and nurtured my vision of writing what inspired me without concern for genre. When I realized I needed to re-enter the singer songwriter world when my son was 12, Rebecca Parris, a phenomenal jazz singer and an even more phenomenal coach, held a space where I could cry my way through the songs I would later be able to sing from my heart. Doug Hammer, who has been my local sound engineer and collaborator for 15 years has helped me navigate all the technological changes in producing music, sat by my side as we edited recording projects note by note and line by line, and has been an instrumental partner in my countless dimensions of my creative process as both my music and I have continued to grow. A local journalist mentored me to improve my press release writing and article pitching skills, modeling her command of language and helping me hone my sense of pitch angles.

When I wanted insightful feedback about my songs in process, Susan Cattaneo has provided wisdom and coaching. In every facet of my work as a musician, mentorship has improved my skills, helped me realize my vision, and provided emotional anchoring in an often challenging business landscape.

I have also mentored artists most of my life, from a classmate in high school who was told she was tone deaf and not to sing (I helped her learn to match pitch and sing) to young artists I met as I helped run an adult-teen mentoring program for which I produced an annual benefit concert spotlighting young talent, a very talent daughter of a friend of mine who I invited to perform with me on some of Boston's biggest stages, to more formally through the mentorship program at the New England Regional Folk Alliance program and through my participation in GrammyU. It is a privilege to create a space to help other artists of all ages speak their dream, hone their skills, care for their hearts and work towards their vision.

All of this experience fuels my vision for the ISSA Summit Mentoring Program.

1. In our ISSA community, we have amazing people with all kinds of talents and experiences.
2. All of us have areas of expertise and areas where we can learn and grow and areas where our skills and experiences can help others learn and grow. This is true at all ages and stages of our personal and music lives.
3. When we offer skills and experiences through personal mentorship, we have the wonderful opportunity to help other artists grow and fly.
4. When we are mentored by other artists who have skills and experiences where we can learn and grow, we grow stronger.

At the **ISSA Summit,** the mentoring program will include both a **Mentoring Panel** on Thursday at 1 pm and an **on-site Summit Mentorship Program** where we will pair a mentor with a mentee to meet at a mutually convenient time during the days of the Summit.

The **Mentoring Panel** will explore what is mentoring and why will it matter. Joining me will be Dawn Rix, Charu Suri and Emily E Finke.

For the **On-Site Summit Mentoring Programs,** we have started to gather people who want to mentor and be mentored through the following google doc. Please sign up to mentor, be mentored or both here: https://forms.gle/kGX4NpqfVBGwdsLQ6

We hope this is just the beginning of building a Mentoring Program within the ISSA Community. We have so much to share with one another! **Help us lay that foundation at the ISSA Summit!**

Emily E. Finke – Demystifying the Recording Booth



Thursday, August 20 - 3:30 PM

Engineering Session + Workshop - Followed by Q&A Panel

If you have ever stared at a mixing board and felt completely lost—or worse, convinced yourself that great recordings are only possible in million-dollar studios—then clear your schedule for Thursday afternoon. ISSA's **2025 Sound Engineer of the Year, Emily E. Finke**, is taking over the 3:30 PM slot to tear down those walls and prove that audio engineering is far more accessible than you think.

Emily is pulling double duty, running back-to-back sessions that are guaranteed to shift your perspective. First up is her presentation and hands-on workshop, **"Audio Engineering and Creativity: Discovery Through Experimentation."** Emily views recording not as a sterile technical chore, but as an **extension of the songwriting process**—an essential building block of your artistic brand. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word "Discovery" to receive a free "Summit Raffle Coupon".* She will walk you through the basics of gear, setup, and mixing, but her real message is about mindset: fancy microphones and treated rooms are just tools, not prerequisites. The magic lies in learning how to listen, experiment, and discover your unique sonic fingerprint.

True to her philosophy of embracing "accidents" as innovation, Emily will rebrand the fear of failure into the thrill of trial and error. Her workshop promises to be interactive and hands-on, showing you exactly how to make decisions in real-time with just a microphone and a laptop.

Following a brief transition break, Emily will host an open **Q&A panel session**, giving you the chance to pick her brain directly. Whether you are a complete novice or a bedroom producer looking to level up, this is your opportunity to get practical answers in a no-judgment zone.

If you have ever felt intimidated by the technical side of your art, do not miss this session. Come ready to ask questions, roll up your sleeves, and discover that the recording booth is not a barrier—it is your next creative playground.

Friday, August 21 - 9:00 AM

Jeremy Edmond will be taking the podium, you can find out more about his background and presentation in the May ISSA Summit Newsletter.

Friday, August 21 - 10:15 AM

Randiie O'Neil & Emo Leblanc will be taking the podium, you can find out more about their background and presentation in the June ISSA Summit Newsletter.

Alan Garmonsway – Inside the Judge's Panel

Friday, August 21 - 11:30 AM



Ever wonder what really goes on behind the closed doors of the ISSA Awards judging process? On Friday at 11:30 AM, the curtain gets pulled back in a major way.

Alan Garmonsway—last year's **International Album Gold Winner**—is leading a can't-miss session titled **"Inside the Judge's Panel."** He will be joined by fellow Gold winners **Emily Judson** (US Emerging Artist) and **Caitlin Mae** (US Single) for a candid, behind-the-scenes look at what it truly takes to evaluate nearly **1,000 individual Finalists across 40 categories**.

This panel is more than just war stories. Alan and his fellow judges will walk you through the entire journey—from locating the songs and artists to the fine margins that separate Gold from Silver. They will share what they look for when evaluating songs across different genres, reveal their overall impressions of the submissions, and even dish on the funny moments that come with the territory. Beyond the music, they will discuss how supplemental information like social media presence, personal websites, and recording history can tip the scales in a judge's decision.

With the **Awards Ceremony taking place the very next day**, this session arrives at the perfect moment. It promises a blend of serious insight and good humor, designed to help attendees understand the diversity of viewpoints that make ISSA judging so thorough—and fair.

While it may be too late to change the outcome of the 2026 Awards, this session is a golden opportunity to gain the inside knowledge you will need for **2027 and beyond**. And if you happen to hit Gold this year, consider this your official preview of what you will be in for when you are invited to judge next year's class!

Do not miss this chance to step inside the judges' shoes. The insights you walk away with might just be the edge you need next time around.

Keynote Address: Sam George – The Future Sounds Human



Friday, August 21 - 1:00 PM

What if the greatest threat to your music isn't artificial intelligence... but sounding exactly like everyone else?

That is the provocative question award-winning producer, songwriter, and Dolby Atmos engineer **Sam George** will pose when he takes the stage as the ISSA Summit's **Keynote Speaker** on Friday at 1:00 PM. And trust us—his answer will reshape how you think about your art.

As AI, algorithms, and automation rapidly reshape the music industry at breakneck speed, a wave of anxiety has swept through the creative community. Artists everywhere are asking the same uneasy question: *Where do I fit in?* But in this thought-provoking keynote, Sam challenges us to consider that we have been asking the wrong question entirely.

The Core Message: Why Human Creativity Matters More Than Ever

Rather than fixating on what AI is capable of, Sam turns the lens inward—exploring the qualities that remain **uniquely and irreducibly human**. His central argument is both bold and reassuring: technology doesn't diminish the need for artists; it raises the standard for what it means to be one.

Blending real-world creative case studies, interactive audience exercises, and practical frameworks drawn from his own internationally recognized projects, Sam will demonstrate why the most valuable currency in music over the coming decade won't be technical proficiency or algorithmic optimization—it will be authenticity.

What You Will Discover

This isn't a doom-and-gloom lecture about robots stealing your job. It is an empowering deep dive into the very things that make your music *yours*. Sam will unpack:

- **Why specificity beats imitation**—how leaning into your unique perspective is your greatest competitive advantage.
- **Why creative constraints often produce the strongest work**—and how limitations can become your secret weapon.
- **Why intention, perspective, and lived experience** are becoming the defining characteristics of unforgettable music in an age of infinite content.

This keynote is not about resisting technology. It is a challenge—a call to arms—to become the kind of artist technology can never replace.

Who Is Sam George?

Sam George is no stranger to pushing boundaries. An award-winning producer, songwriter, recording and Dolby Atmos engineer, artist, author, and educator, he is recognized internationally for his work at the intersection of technology, storytelling, and modern music production.

A former songwriting and music production teacher at the prestigious **BRIT School**, Sam is the author of *Become a Competent Music Producer in 365 Days*, with its highly anticipated follow-up, *Become a Competent Songwriter in 365 Days*, currently in development. His production credits read like a who's-who of modern heavy music, including work with internationally acclaimed artists such as **Howard Jones** (Killswitch Engage), **Matthew K. Heafy** (Trivium), **Scott LePage** (Polyphia), and **Javier Reyes** (Animals As Leaders).

His productions have earned multiple international awards and millions of streams, while his work as the founder of **Mammoth Sound Studio** in Spain and the creative force behind **Pick Up Goliath** combines technical innovation with deeply human storytelling. Sam helps artists create music that is emotionally distinctive, sonically ambitious, and impossible to ignore.

Why You Cannot Miss This

Whether you are a songwriter, producer, performer, or composer, this keynote is designed to leave you with something far more valuable than notes on a page. You will walk away with a renewed sense of creative purpose and a powerful new perspective on your place in the future of music.

Sam George sits at the center of the most important conversation happening in our industry right now. His voice on the future of music in the age of AI is not just informed—it is essential.

Come with your questions. Leave with your answers. And discover why **The Future Sounds Human**.

Visit Sam Online:
www.pickupgoliath.com
www.mammothsoundstudio.com





Karaoke Under the Stars Gets the Green Light – Meet Your Host!



Great news, songwriters—the response is in, and it's a resounding *yes*! We are officially turning the Marriott Courtyard into our own personal stage on **Thursday night at 7:00 PM** for the inaugural ISSA Summit Karaoke Night. Though this isn't a formal educational "session," these after-hours gatherings are exactly what make the Summit unforgettable—a chance to let loose, bond with fellow attendees, and share the joy of singing without needing a guitar in hand. So grab your favorite adult beverage, warm up those vocal cords, and get ready for a night of pure, unplugged (well, electrically amplified!) fun.

Let's give a huge shout out and thank you to **Chad Rivette**, who is generously bringing his karaoke setup to host the evening. While Chad is happy to be your karaoke DJ for the night, he is *far* more than just a guy with a microphone and a screen. He's an accomplished, multi-faceted musician and performer in his own right, with a deep passion for live entertainment and connecting with audiences. Chad knows exactly how to read a room, keep the vibe rolling, and make even the shyest singers feel like rockstars. We highly encourage you to check out his original music and performance history at his website: **https://chadrivette.com/** – you'll quickly see we're in incredibly talented hands.

The mic goes hot at **7:00 PM sharp** on Thursday, and we'll keep the party rolling until the last belter calls it a night (or the courtyard management kicks us out!). Whether you want to tribute your favorite icon, test out a new cover, or just cheer on your peers, come ready to make some noise. This is *your* Summit—so let's sing it loud! See you in the Courtyard.





A Brand New Tradition: The First-Ever Summit Lapel Pin Exchange

This August, the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) is launching an exciting new tradition at the annual ISSA Summit in Atlanta. The **First-Ever ISSA Summit Lapel Pin Exchange** invites attendees to create custom pins that represent their unique musical identity—and trade them with fellow artists, songwriters, and music professionals from around the world.

More Than a Collectible

The pin exchange is designed to be much more than a trading activity. According to event organizers, every pin exchanged represents:

- **A conversation starter** – breaking the ice with fellow artists
- **A new connection** – expanding your network in the music industry
- **A potential collaboration** – sparking creative partnerships
- **A lifelong friend** – building relationships that extend beyond the Summit

The motto is simple: *Trade. Talk. Connect.*

How to Participate

Step 1: Create Your Custom Pin

Design a lapel pin that represents you—your music, your band, your business, your hometown, or your unique personality. There are many affordable options available online; one recommended source is 24 Hour Wristbands for custom lapel pins.

Step 2: RSVP for the Summit

Reserve your spot by emailing ISSASongwriters.Todd@gmail.com to confirm your attendance.

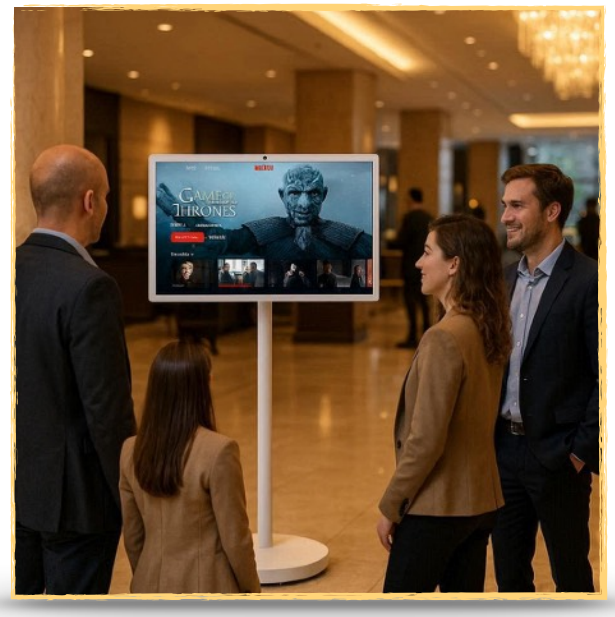
Step 3: Claim Your Complimentary Starter Pins

Your RSVP reserves a complimentary Summit Swag Bag, complete with a lanyard and TWO starter pins to launch your collection and begin trading right away.

Let the Trading Begin!

The best opportunities often start with a simple introduction—and this year, a new conversation can easily begin with a pin. Whether you're a seasoned industry professional or an emerging artist, the pin exchange offers a fun, low-pressure way to connect with the global ISSA community.

Double the Exposure: New Video & Promo Opportunity at the 8th Annual ISSA Summit



We are thrilled to announce a brand-new visibility opportunity for members attending the 8th Annual ISSA Summit this August. For just **$25**, you can place your music video, artist brand, or business in front of industry VIPs—and now, with not one but **two screens** running on a continuous loop at the host hotel, your exposure is bigger than ever.

Whether you're performing on stage, networking in the hallways, or simply want to make an impression even if you can't attend in person, this affordable add-on ensures you'll *Be Seen, Be Heard, and Be Remembered* all weekend long.

Your Spotlight Options

You can choose between two types of featured content:

- **Music Video Showcase** – Have your music video (up to 6 minutes) included in a high-exposure playlist that loops continuously throughout the event. Perfect for gaining new fans and catching the ears of producers, labels, and fellow artists.
- **Artist & Business Promo Loop** – Flash your artist photo, band logo, album artwork, upcoming release info, website, or a 30-second promotional ad. This is an ideal way to drive traffic to your socials, streaming pages, or merchandise.

With **two screens** running in heavy rotation, your content will receive maximum visibility—repeatedly seen by every attendee, from emerging songwriters to industry decision-makers.

Important Details

- **Open to:** All current ISSA Members (attending the Awards Show or not)
- **Cost:** Only $25
- **Content length:** Music videos up to 6 minutes; promo slides or ads up to 30 seconds
- **Placement:** Continuous loop on both screens at the host hotel throughout the entire Summit
- **Availability:** Extremely limited—spots are filling fast on a first-come, first-served basis

“We’ve doubled the screens to double the impact, this is a rare chance to put your work in front of the right people, even if you can’t be there in person this year.”

How to Secure Your Spot

To lock in your space, act quickly. Reach out to **Angela Marie Eidenmiller** right now via email:

ISSAsongwriters.angela@gmail.com

Include your member details, your preferred content type, and your media file (or let her know you’ll send it shortly). Once your spot is confirmed, you’ll be added to the rotation and ready to shine.

Don’t wait—space is strictly limited and demand is high. This is your chance to get your music or brand in front of the people who can make a difference in your career.





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 a Beverage Tumbler and 2 Commemorative Lapel Pins**. These are legit – don't miss out.

The 2026 ISSA Summit Raffle & Swag Bags – Let's Make This the Best One Yet!



Can you feel the excitement building? The 2026 ISSA Summit is just around the corner, and we are buzzing with anticipation to see all of your bright, creative faces in Atlanta! While we are busy putting the final touches on what promises to be our most inspiring Summit yet, we need to talk about two of the most fun parts of the Summit: **The ISSA Summit Raffle** and our legendary **Swag Bags**!

First Up: The Raffle – Your Chance to Win & Support the Summit!

We know what you might be thinking: "The Summit is so well run, it must just come together by magic!" While we love that compliment, the truth is that it takes a lot of behind-the-scenes work—and yes, real-world costs—to create this inspiring haven for independent artists. From the conference room rentals to the awards show production, we pour our hearts (and personal budgets) into making sure this experience is unforgettable for you.

That's where our **Annual Raffle** comes in! The funds raised through your raffle ticket purchases play a *massive* role in offsetting the costs of the Summit. By buying a handful of tickets, you aren't just entering to win incredible prizes; you are directly helping to keep the Summit vibrant, affordable, and sustainable for years to come. You become a **Patron of the Arts** for our songwriting tribe—and we can't thank you enough for that!

But Wait… What Can You Win?

Oh, we are so glad you asked! We are absolutely blown away by the generosity of our sponsors and partners. Currently, we have over **$15,000 worth of spectacular prizes** lined up for you—and we just added even more!

Check out this incredible lineup:

- **1 Handmade Cigar Box Guitar** from *Stogie Joe Guitars* (A truly one-of-a-kind instrument!)
- **1 Pair of Wireless Professional Headphones** from *AIAIAI Audio* (Studio quality, cable-free!)
- **3 Audio Plugins** from *PSP Audioware* (Give your mixes that professional sheen!)
- **3 Audio Plugins** from *Polyverse* (We know you've been eyeing these!)

- **1 200-CD Duplication Package** from *Atomic Disc* (Get your music ready for the world!)
- **4 Box Sets of Skin Care Products** from *Tamanie Dove & SkinSessed* (Stay glowing on the road!)
- ✨ **NEWLY ADDED BY YOUR SUMMIT STAFF:** We've dug into our own treasure chests to donate a stylish **Bracelet**, a cool pair of **Sunglasses**, and **5 Thermal Back Packs**—all bundled into some seriously **cool raffle gift boxes** just for you!

A Huge Shout-Out to Our Partners!

We want to pause and give a massive round of applause to these amazing companies—and to our very own staff! Without this support, this raffle wouldn't be possible. Let's support the people who support us!



And That's Not All – Let's Talk Swag Bags!

We are thrilled to announce that **T-Mobile** has generously donated **100 awesome thermal cooler Swag Bags** for our attendees! But we didn't stop there—our Summit staff has been busy collecting and purchasing some incredible goodies to stuff inside them. When you arrive, get ready to snag a bag filled with:

•**100 Koozies** (Keep your drinks cool while you network!)
•**200 Guitar Picks** (Never be without a pick for that impromptu jam!)
•**100 Notebooks** (Jot down those lightning-bolt inspirations!)
•**400 Stickers** (Perfect for personalizing your new gear!)
•**100 Tumblers** (Slap one of those stickers on here and stay hydrated!)
•**200 Lapel Pins** (Wear your ISSA pride loud and proud!)

Let's Start a Trading Tradition!



We want these bags to be more than just goodies—we want them to spark connection! We **encourage everyone to bring along their own stickers** to trade with fellow attendees (stick yours on that new tumbler!). Plus, let's start a **pin exchange tradition**—bring your own lapel pins from your hometown, your band, or past events to swap with new friends. It's a fantastic way to break the ice and take home a little piece of someone else's story!

Want to Contribute to the Swag Bags?
If you have a product, promo item, or fun goodies you'd like to include (any quantity is welcome!), please reach out to **Todd Apfel** at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** or **Angela Marie Eidenmiller** at **issasongwriters.angela@gmail.com**. Let's make these bags unforgettable together!

Hidden Word Winners!

Before we get to the ticket details, let's celebrate five of our eagle-eyed readers! We are pleased to announce that **Andy Smith, Emily Finke, Sharise D'souza, Candy Carpenter and Dawn Rix** each found some of the hidden sentences in last month's newsletter.

- **Dawn Rix** discovered one of the keywords and earns **1 extra Raffle Ticket!**
- **Candy Carpenter** also found one of the keywords and will also be receiving 1 **extra Raffle Ticket!**
- **Sharise D'souza** uncovered 2 of the keywords and will be receiving 2 **extra Raffle Tickets!**
- **Emily Finke** found 4 keywords - so she'll be receiving 4 **extra Raffle Tickets!**
- **Andy Smith** found all 6 keywords – so he receives 6 **extra Raffle Tickets!**

Keep reading future issues – you never know when the next hidden word might appear!

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

Good news: For the first time ever, you can get ahead of the game and purchase your Raffle Tickets before you even pack your bags! Use **PayPal** or **Venmo** to secure your chances at these amazing prizes right now. Just send an email to our very own **Todd Apfel** at **issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com**, and he will reply with his payment information.

Here are the sweet ticket packages available:

- **$1 for 1 ticket** (It's a no-brainer!)
- **$5 for 7 tickets** (Great value!)
- **$10 for 15 tickets** (Double your fun!)

- **$20 for 40 tickets** (This is the sweet spot!)
- **$50 for 125 tickets** (Go big or go home!)

Don’t wait until you get to Atlanta! Buying ahead helps us plan better and ensures you don't miss out on these incredible bundles. Plus, remember to keep your eyes peeled in future newsletters—there may be more hidden keywords popping up that could net you extra entries!

Let’s make this the biggest, most memorable Summit yet. Buy your tickets, support our sponsors, pack your stickers and pins to trade, and help us keep the ISSA Summit thriving!



The Final Countdown: 6 Must-Do’s Before August 22nd!

Now that you've learned all about the Summit (August 20 & 21), let's get you the up-to-date info on the week's *coup de grâce*—and that's the **8th Annual ISSA Awards Show**, being held **August 22nd** at the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center.

We are just over 6 weeks out, and the excitement is officially at an all-time high. The finalists are set, the stage is being prepped, and Atlanta is waiting. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the words “To Do’s” to receive a free “Summit Raffle Coupon”* But before you start packing your bags, let's make sure you've checked off these critical July to-dos. Do them now, and your trip will be smooth sailing!

1. Finalists: Send Us Your Walk-Up Song (ASAP!)

If you're a finalist and haven't sent us your Walk-Up song yet... **we need it ASAP!** 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** *(Don't delay—we're building the show finalist playlist now!)*

2. Buy Your Ticket & Plan Your Red Carpet Experience



Have you purchased your Awards Show Tickets? If not, **why not**? Over the past few months, we've shared countless testimonials showing exactly 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.

To put it bluntly: **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?

And speaking of making an entrance—let's talk about the Red Carpet!

- **Doors open at 12 noon** for the full **Red Carpet Experience**. The Awards Show itself starts **promptly at 2:00 pm**—so arrive early to soak it all in.
- **Michael Botte** is back to do his legendary Red Carpet interviews!
- We're thrilled to welcome **WHIN (Nashville) on-air personality Jeff Shannon** to the carpet this year—he'll be conducting interviews alongside Michael.
- Our famous **360 Video Booth** is returning, so you can create unforgettable, shareable videos before you even take your seat.

Don't miss your moment in the spotlight. Grab your ticket now:

https://issasongwriters.com/tickets/





3. Book Your Travel – Flights Are Filling Up!



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

If you're flying, remember 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, but it also means flights book up fast. Secure your favorite arrival and departure flights now before they fill up.

4. Reserve Your Host Hotel Room (Urgent! Free Perks Added!)

Have you made your hotel reservations yet? There are plenty of options near the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Center, but our official **Host Hotel is the Courtyard by Marriott**—and we have a very important update!

Urgency: Our block of discounted rooms is getting *very* low. If you wait, you risk paying full price or staying further away.

New Perks: For those who book using our special discount code, the Marriott is throwing in **FREE breakfast each day** AND **FREE parking** (normally $10/night)! That's a huge savings.

IMPORTANT: You must **purchase an Awards Show Ticket** to receive the discount code for the hotel. So, if you haven't grabbed your ticket yet (see Item #2!), do that first, then lock in your room immediately to secure these free perks.





5. Register for the FREE Summit (Yes, Even if You Saw It Earlier!)

Yes, we've told you about this earlier in the newsletter, but we *really* want to make sure you register for the **FREE Summit**!

The Summit is completely 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.

REMEMBER: Only the first **100 people to register** are guaranteed a **T-Mobile Thermal Cooler Bag**—so don't sleep on this!

6. Grab Your 2026 Commemorative Gear

Before you leave for Atlanta, make sure you have your commemorative Awards Show & Summit memorabilia—from T-shirts to keepsakes you'll treasure for years. These always sell out fast, so order ahead and wear your ISSA pride all weekend long.

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

That's it, ISSA family! Knock these 6 items off your list this July, and you'll be free to focus on what really matters when you hit Atlanta: celebrating your music, connecting with your ISSA family, and making memories that will last a lifetime.



ISSA Awards 2026 Tee Shirt



Embroidered 2026 Summit Cap



2026 ISSA Summit Tee Shirt



The Summit Artist Spotlight for July - Emily Judson

There are singer-songwriters who make music for the sake of it. And then there are those who make music because of it—because the world needs to hear something true, something healing, something that moves the needle.

This month, we are proud to shine our spotlight on Emily Judson, a Kansas-raised artist whose advocacy-centered songwriting is as rooted in the prairie soil as it is in the human spirit. From rural farmland to the heart of Wichita's Riverside neighborhood, Emily is proving that music can be both deeply personal and powerfully communal.

From the Farm to the Stage

Emily Judson was raised on a beautiful farm in rural Kansas, where prairie living, travel, and a deep commitment to community service shaped her worldview—and her songwriting style. Her parents gave her a guitar in the third grade, and that simple gift sparked a lifelong passion for creating music with a purpose.

During high school, Emily joined the band Wur'ship Project, contributing as a writer and performer while touring and recording the album *You Called Us Out*. After relocating to Wichita, she formed the Emily Judson Band and released *One More Song*, a genre-spanning collection of original tracks that tackled weighty subjects like immigration reform and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. It was clear from the start: Emily Judson was an artist with something to say.



Finding Home on 'Riverside'

In 2023, Emily released *Riverside*, an alternative folk album born from the rhythms and reflections of life along the river in Wichita's Riverside neighborhood. The project was a true labor of love—and a community collaboration in every sense.



Recorded at Church of the Savior in the heart of Riverside, the album featured some of Wichita's finest musicians, including bassist Mark Foley, drummer Steve Hatfield, guitarist Brandon Judson, and keyboardist Blaine Martin. Cellist Dan Overholt became the project's "secret ingredient," engineering, mixing, and co-producing the record.

The concept came together during a season when Emily's kids had returned to school, and she decided to dedicate herself to daily songwriting again. "I just couldn't stop writing music about Riverside," she recalled. "I thought, 'I think this would be a really neat connection tool and a great way to honor the neighborhood'". All proceeds from the album are donated to support Riverside's public schools and nonprofits, embodying Emily's belief that art should give back to the community that inspires it.

The album earned critical acclaim, landing on NPR for Wichita affiliate KMUW's Strange Currency host Jedd Beaudoin's top ten local/regional albums of the year.

A Rising Star with a Golden Touch

2024 was a breakout year for Emily. She was honored with the **Rising Star award** at the International Singer-Songwriters Association Awards held in Atlanta, Georgia. Her track "Stay in Riverside" earned **Best Alternative Song** from the World Songwriting Awards and claimed victory in the Kansas Soundscapes Songwriting Contest. Adding to her momentum, Emily's empowering song "Daughter" reached the semi-finals of the International Songwriting Competition and was named a finalist in the Social Causes category.

That same year, Emily lent her vocals to two notable releases—"Hold Fast" by Aaron Hymes and "Messed Up" by Andrew Chappell—showcasing her versatility and growing presence in the music scene.

2025: A Year of Collaboration and Recognition

In 2025, Emily made waves with her hit single "It's My Farm," featuring Andrew Chappell. The track garnered widespread acclaim and a string of accolades:

- 🏆 **Best Music Collaboration** – World Songwriting Awards
- 🏆 **Collaboration of the Year** – Elite Music Awards
- 🎵 **Nominations** – Hollywood Independent Music Awards (Singer-Songwriter category), Josie Music Awards (Folk Song of the Year and Vocal Event of the Year)

Her unreleased track "Cozy Kind of Love" also received a nomination for the Songwriting Achievement Award. Most notably, Emily was honored as **Emerging Artist of the Year** at the 2025 International Singer-Songwriters Association Awards. This recognition helped propel "It's My Farm" to **Grammy consideration**, landing on the Recording Academy's first ballot for **Best American Roots Song** and **Best Americana Performance**.

The Heart Behind the Music

When Emily isn't writing music or spending time with her family, you will likely find her at the Riverside Community Garden she helps run, happily covered in dirt and surrounded by butterflies, working to reduce food insecurity in her city. It's a fitting image for an artist whose work is so deeply intertwined with community care.

What's Next?

Emily is currently promoting her latest release, an acoustic folk song titled **"Endlessly"** —a song she secretly recorded last year as a surprise for her husband for their anniversary. This summer, she'll be busy writing new music, listening to a lot of amazing ISSA artists as a judge for the **2026 ISSA Awards**, and recording new music with her favorite local Wichita musicians at her favorite studio, Zeptepland.

"I hope to submit 'Endlessly' for Best American Roots Song later this summer," Emily shares. Her music goals are clear: continue writing for advocacy projects and sync licensing, collaborate with and support other artists, and become a member of the Recording Academy.



Thanks to the International Singer-Songwriters Association, Emily got to experience her first Grammy submission process last year and learned a lot. "I have a longing to win another ISSA. But who doesn't?" she says with a smile.

Stay Connected

Show this incredible artist some love! Visit her official website at emilyjudsonmusic.com and follow her on Facebook and Instagram **@emilyjudsonmusic**.

Emily Judson – prairie roots, Riverside heart, and a voice that sings for something bigger than herself. 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 I want to take a moment to share something exciting that came my way recently–and more importantly, an opportunity that I'm extending to all of you.

Hey Family,

I hope this finds you all well and busy creating the amazing music that makes our community so special.



I was recently invited to be a featured guest on "The Lovelace Music Experience" with host Tom Lovelace on WTBQ in Warwick, NY. WTBQ is the #1 Community Radio Station (AM 1110 FM 93.5) For those of you who haven't tuned in, it is a fantastic, intimate show that truly puts the artist first. Tom doesn't just spin tracks; he creates a vibe. I had the privilege of doing a five-song showcase where we dove deep—not just into the music, but into the background, the stories, and the "why" behind each track. It was one of those experiences that reminds you why we do this in the first place.

I was so blown away by the experience that I didn't want it to end. So, I've offered to help Tom curate music for upcoming episodes! I am now acting as a bridge between this fantastic radio platform and the incredibly talented songwriters and performers I know. You can imagine that my first thought went straight to my ISSA brothers and sisters.

Here is the deal: Tom's show airs every Saturday from 10-11am, and he is looking for fresh talent to feature. If you are interested, here is how you can get involved:

1. **Send Me a Track:** Email me directly at **michaelbotteband@gmail.com** with a sample MP3 of your work.
2. **The Selection:** I will listen to your track and, if it's a fit, you may be selected for a five-song showcase on the show.
3. **The Feature:** You will get a chance to tell your story, share your journey, and have your music heard by a new audience.

This is a genuine opportunity to get some airtime and connect with a host who genuinely cares about the artists he features. I'm looking forward to hearing what you all send in.

Good luck, and keep making that great music!

Peace & Music,
Michael Botte

PS: Check out The Lovelace Music Experience on Facebook for more info on past shows and the general vibe: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100061645818474



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.

Why Is Meta Flagging My Music? Understanding Whitelisting and Copyright Protection

You spend months writing, recording, mixing, mastering, and releasing your latest single. You own 100% of the master recording. You upload a promotional video to Facebook or Instagram... and within minutes you get a notification that your post has been flagged for copyright infringement.

Your first reaction is probably something along the lines of: "Excuse me? That's MY song!" As frustrating as it feels, this usually isn't a mistake. In fact, it's often a sign that your music distribution and publishing partners are doing exactly what they're supposed to do.

Why This Happens

When your music is delivered to streaming services and social media platforms through your distributor or Fingerprinting Service Provider (FSP), it's added to a massive content identification system.

Think of it as a digital fingerprint.

Every time someone uploads content using your music, platforms like Facebook and Instagram compare that audio against their fingerprint database. If there's a match, the system checks whether that use is authorized. The problem is that the system doesn't automatically know you're the owner.

It simply recognizes that someone uploaded copyrighted music. That "someone" just happens to be you.

The Good News

Believe it or not, this is actually good news. It means your music is being protected. Without these fingerprinting systems, anyone could upload your music, monetize videos with it, or claim it as their own without your permission.

The copyright match tells you your FSP is actively watching for unauthorized uses of your recordings. In other words, the security system is working. It just doesn't recognize the homeowner standing at the front door.

So... What Is Whitelisting?

Whitelisting is simply giving permission in advance for certain accounts to use your protected music without triggering copyright claims. Once your Facebook Page, Instagram account, YouTube channel, or TikTok profile is whitelisted, those accounts are essentially placed on the "approved users" list. The fingerprinting system sees the match, checks the approved list, and allows your content to stay online without interruption.

How Do You Get Whitelisted?

Every distributor and rights management company handles this a little differently, but the process usually looks something like this:
* Log into your distributor or rights management dashboard.
* Look for sections labeled Rights Management, Content ID, Social Media Monetization, or Whitelisting.
* Add the URLs or usernames of your official social media accounts.
* Save your changes before posting new promotional content.

Some companies process whitelist requests immediately, while others may take a day or two to update across platforms.

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Don't Wait Until You Get Flagged

One of the smartest things you can do before releasing new music is whitelist all of your official accounts. That includes:
* Your Facebook Artist Page
* Your personal Facebook profile (if you post promotional content there)
* Your Instagram account
* Your YouTube channel
* Your TikTok account

A few minutes of preparation can save a lot of frustration on release day.

What If You've Already Been Flagged?

Don't panic. First, do not delete your post. Deleting it can remove your ability to dispute the claim and may reset any progress you've made. Instead:
* Check whether your distributor offers a whitelist feature.
* Add your official accounts if you haven't already.
* Wait for the whitelist to become active.
* If the claim is still active, use the platform's dispute option directly on the flagged post.

When filing a dispute, keep it simple and factual. You can say something like:
* ”I am the owner of this recording and hold 100% of the rights. This content was uploaded by me and is authorized for use."
* Submit the dispute and allow time for review.
* If the issue continues, contact your distributor's support team and let them know you've already disputed the claim.

In many cases, they'll be able to resolve the problem quickly.

The Bottom Line

Copyright protection can sometimes feel like an overzealous security guard who stops even the owner from entering the building. Yes, it's annoying. Yes, it's inconvenient. But it's also protecting your music from being used and monetized by people who don't have permission.

So the next time Meta tells you your own song has been flagged, take a deep breath. It usually means your Fingerprinting Service Provider is doing its job. The key is making sure your own social media accounts are on the guest list before release day. A little whitelisting today can save you a lot of headaches tomorrow.

While "fingerprinting service provider" isn't a formal industry-standard term, it is commonly used informally to describe companies that provide audio fingerprinting and content identification services, such as distributors or rights management platforms that integrate with systems like Meta Rights Manager or YouTube Content ID.



From the Listeners of The Rick Spins Radio Show

The Chart Illusion: Why Your "Hit" Might Be Killing Your Career

July's "Question of The Month": We had a question that we were going to answer and then at the last minute, this popped up and it needs to be addressed!

Last month, we pulled back the curtain on Pay-to-Play radio. We told you that if a station charges you to play your song, they are not a radio station—they are a toll booth.

This month, we need to talk about what happens *after* you pay that toll. Because every day, I see members posting about a "chart position" their song has achieved. And every time I look up the station behind that chart, I find the same thing: another Pay-to-Play operation.

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

And the charts they sell you? They aren't real charts. They are illusions designed to stroke your ego and keep you paying.

The "Chart" That Isn't a Chart

Here's what these stations don't tell you: their charts are not based on listener requests. They aren't based on genuine audience engagement. They are based on one thing—**what promotional package you purchased**.

Pay $150 for the Standard package? You might land at number 25. Pay $350 for the Premier package? Suddenly you're in the Top 5. It's not magic. It's math. And the formula is simple: **the more you pay, the higher you chart.**

This isn't a chart. It's a receipt.

And here's the part that should make you angry: these charts are designed to do one thing—**make you feel successful so you'll come back and pay again next month.** They are ego-stroking, wallet-emptying machines disguised as career validation.

The ROI Reality Check

Now, someone out there is thinking: "*But being on a chart drives people to stream my music more!*"

Does it?

Let's go back to the math we discussed last month. Industry standards for advertising ROI are clear:

- **Break-even:** 2:1 (you earn $2 for every $1 spent)
- **Good:** 5:1 (you earn $5 back for every $1 spent)
- **Exceptional:** 10:1 (you earn $10 back for every $1 spent)

Ask yourself: *Is that $150 chart placement bringing me $300 in new streams, merch sales, or ticket revenue?*

The answer is almost certainly no. Streaming platforms pay fractions of a penny per stream. To recoup a $150 investment, you'd need **tens of thousands of *legitimate* new streams**—streams that these fake charts simply don't generate.

Now, if these charts actually sold downloads or albums, that would be a different conversation. But they don't. They sell a number on a screen. And numbers on screens don't pay your bills.

The Real Danger: Getting Your Music Pulled

This brings me to the most urgent point—one that hit close to home just recently.

An ISSA member had their entire album pulled from Spotify because of "artificial streams."

This member had paid a PR firm and a radio station—the exact type of operation we warned about last month. These firms promised to get their music placed into Spotify playlists. What they didn't tell them was that those playlists were almost certainly **bot playlists**.

This is happening everywhere. In March 2026, Exclaim! reported that Halifax band ONGORAH had all their music removed from Spotify due to artificial streaming activity. The band had spent seven years working on their debut record. "Everything's wiped clean," the band's frontman said, "as if I didn't spend seven years of my life working on my debut record".

In another case, the ECMA-nominated band Spirit of the Wildfire discovered they'd been added to a playlist that was **100 percent bots**. They proactively reported it to Spotify. Spotify responded by removing their **entire album**.

Let that sink in. These bands didn't pay for bots. They didn't ask to be added to fraudulent playlists. But they were caught in the crossfire because they trusted the wrong promotional partners.

Spotify defines an artificial stream as "a stream that doesn't reflect genuine user listening intent, including any instance of attempting to manipulate Spotify by using automated processes (bots or scripts)". And here's the kicker: **Spotify does not distinguish between intentional and unintentional involvement in artificial streaming when applying enforcement measures**.

The consequences are brutal:

- **Stream Reversals:** All artificial streams are removed from your public count
- **Revenue Withholding:** You don't get paid for fraudulent activity
- **Playlist Suppression:** Your tracks may be excluded from algorithmic placements like Release Radar
- **Takedown Risk:** Your music can be removed entirely from the platform
- **Financial Penalties:** Spotify charges labels and distributors per track when flagrant artificial streaming is detected

And the penalties don't stop there. CD Baby warns that "in some cases, it can result in your entire catalog being taken down".

The Bottom Line

Here's what you need to understand: **these Pay-to-Play stations and their "chart" schemes aren't just wasting your money—they are actively endangering your career.**

When you pay for placement on a bot playlist, you aren't "investing in promotion." You are gambling with your entire catalog. And the house always wins.

Spotify itself warns: "Paid 3rd-party services that guarantee streams aren't legitimate. 3rd-party promotional services that advertise streams in return for payment violate our terms & conditions, and using them could result in your music being removed from Spotify".

Our Advice:

1. **If a service guarantees streams or chart positions, run.** Legitimate promotion doesn't come with guarantees—it comes with hard work.
2. **Vet every promotional partner.** Ask exactly where your music will be placed. If they can't tell you, walk away.
3. **Monitor your Spotify for Artists data.** If you see sudden, unexplained spikes in streams, investigate immediately. Report suspicious playlists using Spotify's Playlist Reporter tool.
4. **Never pay for chart positions.** A chart you can buy isn't a chart—it's a bill.
5. **Use the ISSA vetted database.** We've done the homework for you. Stick with partners we've already verified.

Your music is your legacy. Don't let a toll booth operator with a fake chart destroy it.



The Rick Spins Show Crowns Season 4 Champion

The Season 4 “Battle of The Number 1’s” on ISSA Radio reached a thrilling conclusion on **Thursday, July 2nd**, as host Rick Landstrom officially crowned a new champion.

The battle kicked off on May 14th with 21 incredibly talented ISSA artists competing for the top spot. The field featured Zak Webb, Birdy Young, Marie Norris, Austin Davis, Emily Judson, Andy Smith, Jay El Dee, The Low Down Dirty Heathens, The Hazy Phase, Eleyet McConnell, Dalton Jones, Samantha Grimes, Jay Luke, Rowdy’s Rose, Matthew Adam, Jak Fiddler, Mid Lyfes Crisis, Chad Rivette, Brett Ryder, Monique Hutson, and Aaron Hymes.

Over the following weeks, "*The Committee*" faced the difficult task of eliminating three artists per week. The competition narrowed down to six finalists for the final showdown. When the dust settled:

- **Jak Fiddler** secured 3rd place.
- **Samantha Grimes** took home the runner-up spot.
- **Brett Ryder** walked away with the crown and the coveted Gold Record.

Congratulations to Brett for the victory, and a massive thank you to all the participants. Season 4 was, by far, our most competitive battle yet!

What's Next?
Regular programming resumes this **Monday, July 6th**.

About The Rick Spins Show
Hosted by legendary radio personality Rick Landstrom, The Rick Spins Show is a unique opportunity available exclusively on ISSA Radio. Rick hosts two live shows every week:

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

Submit Your Music
Want to be featured? Send your properly meta-tagged files to **issaradio.rick@gmail.com**. Proper tagging makes Rick's job much easier and helps get your music on air faster!





Instead of Spotlighting one of our Sponsor's, this month we're showing all of our great partners who have helped make having the Summit possible!

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Music Industry News!

News From Around The World That Affects All Of Us

The 30-Day Summary

What happened in June: *The AI music debate didn't just continue—it exploded. Artists can now search massive AI training datasets and find their own songs inside them. The legal battles intensified, streaming platforms drew hard lines, and a major federal bill cleared its first hurdle.*

What you need to know this month:

- **Krystle Delgado's lawsuits** against Suno and Udio just added a powerhouse law firm—Hagens Berman, known for taking on Google and Apple.
- **Tidal** dropped a bombshell: starting June 29, wholly AI-generated music will no longer earn royalties on their platform.
- **Irving Azoff's Music Artists Coalition** led 31 organizations in a warning against labels and publishers misusing artist rights in AI deals.
- **The NO FAKES Act** passed the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously on June 18—federal protection against AI deepfakes is closer than ever.
- **SZA** discovered 238 of her songs were used to train AI and called it "degenerate shit."
- **Suno launched "Spark"** —an incubator offering grants to indie artists, but with strings attached.

What you need to do: Read on. We've got a simple action plan at the end.

The Big Story: Artists Can Finally See What's Inside AI Training Data

For months, AI companies have insisted their training data was fair use. But no one could actually see what they trained on.

That changed this month.

The Atlantic's Alex Reisner uncovered four massive music datasets circulating within the AI development community—the largest containing **12 million tracks**—and made them fully searchable through a tool called **AI Watchdog**. These datasets include music from artists like Lady Gaga, Radiohead, Wu-Tang Clan, and Bruce Springsteen.

Artists everywhere are searching and finding their work. **SZA discovered 238 of her songs were used to train AI generators**. One ISSA member told us they found 113 of their own songs.

Why this matters: AI companies built products that compete with you—using your work—without asking permission or paying a dime. And the tools used to download this audio often violate the terms of service of platforms like YouTube and Spotify.

Important caveat: AI Watchdog is currently missing the Suno database. So while many artists are finding their work, the Suno data remains hidden—for now.

What Krystle Delgado says: The AI companies are fighting hard to keep this information secret. But the lawsuits are forcing disclosure.

The Legal Battles Heating Up

Krystle Delgado's Lawsuits Add Major Firepower

The artist-led class action suits against **Suno and Udio** are moving full steam ahead. **Delgado Entertainment Law founder Krystle Delgado remains the lead attorney** in both cases. But here's the big news: **Hagens Berman**—"one of the most feared plaintiffs' firms in the nation"—has joined the fight.

Who is Hagens Berman? They've secured massive settlements against Google ($90 million), Apple ($100 million in an App Store suit, $568 million in an e-books price-fixing complaint), and many others. Now they're targeting the AI music space.

The amended complaint, filed against Udio in New York on June 22, calls the conduct "an attack on the music community's most vulnerable creators". It argues that Udio and Suno "have blatantly stolen works from millions of independent artists".

What this means for you: There's serious legal firepower behind indie artists now. The lawsuits cover not just copyright infringement but also the misappropriation of "names, voices, likenesses, producer tags, or other identifying elements of artistic persona".

Labels Sued Over AI Licensing Deals

In a twist no one saw coming, **major record labels are now being sued** over their AI licensing deals. The lawsuit argues that labels didn't properly inform or compensate artists before licensing their music to AI companies for training—including deals with Suno, Udio, and Spotify.

Irving Azoff Leads 31-Organization Warning

On June 22, **Irving Azoff's Music Artists Coalition** joined 30 other organizations—including the Songwriters of North America, the Ivors Academy, the Black Music Action Coalition, and the Artist Rights Alliance—in publishing an open letter to labels and publishers.

Their message: "Stop the misuse" of creator rights in AI deals. Artists and songwriters are being told they'll be opted into AI-related uses by default, and AI rights clauses are being presented as standard conditions in new deals.

The letter's core argument: Artists "remain the primary holders of many of the rights at stake, including moral, neighbouring, image and personality rights"—and those rights "are not label or publishers assets to be licensed without clear authority, consent and accountability".

The NO FAKES Act Passes First Hurdle

On **June 18**, the US Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously passed the **NO FAKES Act**. Introduced by Senators Chris Coons (D-Del.) and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), the bill would:

- Create federal intellectual property rights for Americans to control their digital replicas
- Allow people to sue over unauthorized use of their likeness
- Provide enforcement mechanisms against AI deepfakes

What YouTube's Lyor Cohen says: A legal right isn't enough—artists need digital infrastructure to enforce it. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the words "No Fakes" to receive a free "Summit Raffle Coupon".* YouTube already has Content ID and likeness-detection tools, positioning them to set the enforcement standard.

Platforms Making Big Moves

Tidal: No Royalties for AI Music

This is **huge**. On **June 29**, Tidal announced that music it identifies as "wholly AI-generated" will **no longer earn royalties or be eligible for direct-to-fan sales**.

Key details:

- The policy went into effect June 29
- Starting **July 15**, AI-generated tracks will receive a dedicated label
- The tag will eventually expand to "substantially AI-generated" content
- AI music associated with "fraudulent activity"—impersonating artists or deceiving listeners—may be blocked or removed
- The policy applies to Tidal Upload, the platform's self-service tool for independent artists

Tidal's statement: "Tidal's priority is ensuring royalties go to original works directly produced, written, and performed by people".

Why this matters: Tidal typically pays artists more than Spotify. This is the strongest stance any major streaming platform has taken against AI music.

Spotify Opens Direct Music Video Uploads

On **June 17**, Spotify launched a beta allowing artists to directly upload full-length music videos, live performances, covers, and studio sessions through Spotify for Artists—bypassing distributors entirely.

Key details:

- "Tens of thousands" of artists now have the option
- Videos are royalty-bearing and may be chart-eligible
- This is a direct challenge to YouTube, which currently dominates music's visual output

The Suno Controversy Deepens

Suno Launches "Spark" Incubator Program

On **June 25**, Suno unveiled **Spark**, a new incubator program for independent artists.

What Spark offers:

- Grants ranging from thousands to tens of thousands of dollars
- Additional marketing funding
- Invitations to Suno's songwriting camps with established artists
- Opportunity to give feedback on new features

The catch(s):

1. Artists must agree to **never criticize Suno** as a condition of participation
2. They must promote their submitted song across social media—**highlighting that it was "made with Suno"**
3. They must post a "clear and conspicuous disclosure" of their relationship with Suno using tags like "#SunoPartner"
4. Artists must create tracks and publish them on the platform with remixing enabled

Who can apply: Unsigned singers, songwriters, and producers 18 and older releasing music under their own name. The program runs through at least March 2027.

What Tim Ingham of MBW says: "Any independent artist taking Suno's Spark cash is, in essence, agreeing to market Suno—nay, reputation-wash Suno—to a highly-sought-after audience of fellow fleshy music makers."

Our take: This is a network marketing campaign, pure and simple. Suno is paying indie artists to legitimize their brand. The company recently closed a **$400 million Series D funding round** valuing it at **$5.4 billion**. They have the money to throw at this—but think carefully before accepting. ***You're not just getting a grant; you're becoming a spokesperson for a company being sued for stealing your work.***

SZA Speaks Out

On June 20, SZA took to social media after discovering 238 of her songs were used to train AI models. Her response was blunt:

"If your a musician and you support this degenerate shit? Your disgusting and there's NOTHING YOU COULD EVER SAY TO ME TO MAKE THIS OKAY".
She also claimed producer Diplo was an investor in Suno and helped train its models on "the best and brightest black minds of writers and producers". Suno's chief product officer responded that the company's training metadata does not include artists' names and cannot replicate material it was trained on.

Doja Cat similarly decried AI this week after fans mistook some AI songs online for her work.

Artist Sends Suno an Invoice

In a symbolic act of resistance, independent artists are now using AI Watchdog to find their music in training data—and sending Suno invoices for unauthorized use. It's gaining attention and inspiring others to do the same.

Other Notable News

Gareth Emery Launches AI-Free Label

Veteran trance DJ and producer Gareth Emery launched a new label called **Emotional Intelligence Records**—dedicated exclusively to AI-free, human-made music and artwork.

Artist Included Launches

A new music tech company called **Artist Included** launched in Los Angeles, aiming to let artists re-record classic tracks using AI-assisted vocal technology.

Rudy Sarzo Admits to Using AI

Rudy Sarzo admitted to using AI during the making of his new solo single, saying "I come clean" about it.

What About the Promise From Last Month?

Last month we promised an updated scorecard of which streaming services are fighting AI fraud. Here it is, current as of July 02, 2026:

Platform	Status
✅ **Tidal**	**NEW: STRONGEST STANCE YET.** No royalties for wholly AI-generated music. Labels start July 15.
✅ **Deezer**	Built AI-detection tool. 75,000 AI songs per day reported.
✅ **Spotify**	"Verified" badge excludes AI artists. Music video uploads now in beta.
⚠️ **YouTube**	AI labeling now mandatory. Content ID used for likeness detection.
⚠️ **Apple Music**	Still quiet. AI-generated music accounts for less than 1% of plays, according to internal data.
❌ **TikTok**	Still a wild west. No verification system for human artists.

Your Action Plan for This Month

✅ **One thing to do TODAY:** Search your music in AI Watchdog. See if your songs are in those training datasets. Knowledge is power.

✅ **One thing to do THIS WEEK:** If you find your music in training data, document it. Screenshots. Dates. Details. This is evidence you may need later.

✅ **One thing to do THIS MONTH:** Think carefully before applying for Suno's Spark grants. The money is tempting—but you're signing up to be a brand ambassador for a company being sued over your work, and you're agreeing never to criticize them.

✅ **One thing to SHARE with your fans:** Keep that line in your bio:

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

The Bottom Line

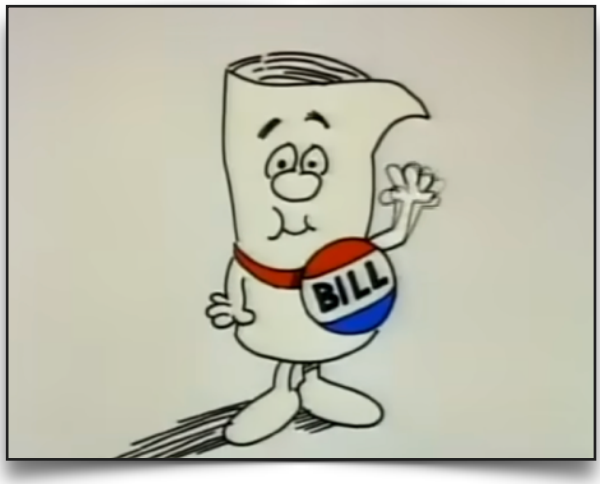
June was a watershed month. Artists can finally see what's in AI training data—and they're finding their own songs. Tidal took the strongest stance yet by refusing to pay royalties for AI music. The NO FAKES Act is moving through Congress. And Krystle Delgado's lawsuits just gained serious firepower.

Here's the truth: **You have more power than you think.** The lawsuits are working. The legislation is moving. Platforms are taking sides. And now you have tools to see the truth for yourself.

Keep searching. Keep documenting. Keep making real music. And remember why we do this—not to fuel panic, but to make sure the songwriter remains the heart of the song.

Next month: We'll cover what to do if you find your music in AI training data—and whether you have legal options.

YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: SUMMER HEAT, BUT NOT ON THE HILL



For four months now, we have tracked the American Music Fairness Act, the Living Wage for Musicians Act, and the growing fight against AI exploitation. We've cheered city council resolutions, marked hearings, and watched as some bills moved forward while others stalled. And here we are in July, with the summer heat in full swing—but on Capitol Hill, things have been... complicated.

Since our last update on June 1, there has been **real movement**—just not on the bills we've been tracking most closely. While AMFA and LWMA remain frozen in place, other legislation has surged ahead. Let's break it down.

The Big News: NO FAKES Act Passes Senate Judiciary Committee

On **June 18, 2026**, the bipartisan NO FAKES Act (Nurture Originals, Foster Art, and Keep Entertainment Safe) advanced unanimously out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by voice vote. This bill would create a new federal intellectual property right protecting every individual's voice and visual likeness from unauthorized AI-generated "digital replicas."

The bill now moves to the full Senate for approval. It has built a remarkable coalition of support, including all three major music companies, the RIAA, the Recording Academy, Spotify, OpenAI, Google, TikTok, SAG-AFTRA, and the AFL-CIO. Senators Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.) led the charge, with Senator Blackburn stating: "*From artists and songwriters to students and everyday Americans, people deserve meaningful protections against deceptive deepfakes and digital impersonation.*"

When to expect action: The bill is now awaiting a vote on the Senate floor. If it passes there, it will move to the House. This could happen before the fall election season heats up—but timing is uncertain.

New Bill on the Block: Protect Working Musicians Act Reintroduced

On **June 10, 2026**, Rep. Deborah Ross (D-NC) introduced the Protect Working Musicians Act of 2026 (H.R. 9253). 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.

The Artists Rights Alliance has launched a full campaign behind it, including town halls and an "artist-led full court press on the Hill." As ARA's Executive Director Jen Jacobsen put it: "*Working musicians are being marginalized while decisions about their life's work are being made without them.*"

When to expect action: The bill was just introduced and currently has three cosponsors. It's in the very early stages—committee hearings would need to happen before any floor vote. This is one to watch, but don't expect movement until late summer or fall at the earliest.

The Stalled: AMFA and LWMA

Here's the frustrating part. **The American Music Fairness Act**—which would finally close the AM/FM radio loophole—has not advanced since the House Judiciary Committee markup was scheduled back in April. The radio industry continues to lobby fiercely against it. **The Living Wage for Musicians Act** remains stalled in Congress, though its grassroots support continues to grow at the local level with city resolutions in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia.

When to expect action: With the 2026 midterm elections approaching this fall, the window for legislative action is narrowing. Once campaign season kicks into high gear in late summer, Congress typically moves slowly on controversial bills. **If these bills don't see movement by September, they likely won't advance until the next Congress in 2027.**

Also on the Radar: TRAIN Act and CLEAR Act

The TRAIN Act (Transparency and Responsibility for Artificial Intelligence Networks Act) remains in committee. It would allow copyright holders to discover if their work was used to train generative AI models without permission. Oscar-winning composer Mark McKenzie testified before Congress about this bill in June.

The CLEAR Act (Copyright Labeling and Ethical AI Reporting Act) would require AI companies to disclose every copyrighted work used in training before a model is released. Both bills are still awaiting committee action.

What This Means for You

Here's the bottom line: **AI protections are moving. Fair pay for radio and streaming is not.**

The NO FAKES Act is on the verge of becoming law. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word "Congress" to receive a free "Summit Raffle Coupon".* The PWMA is gaining momentum. But AMFA and LWMA—the bills that would directly put money in your pocket for radio airplay and streams—are still stuck in neutral.

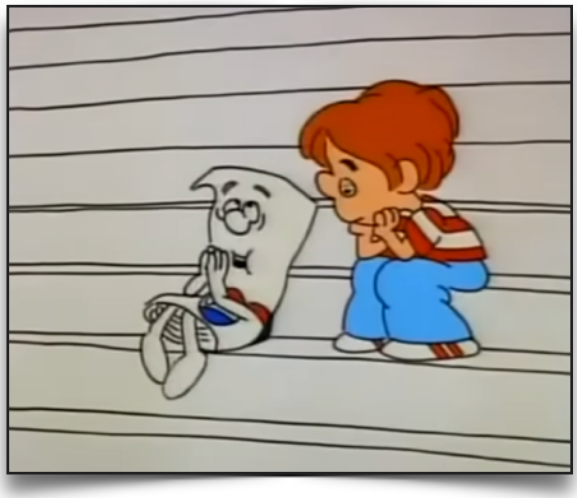
We cannot let this summer pass in silence. The election is coming. Candidates will be asking for your vote. **Make them earn it.**

Your action plan for July:

1. **Call your Representative and Senators.** Tell them: "*I am a musician and a voter. I want you to cosponsor and push for a vote on the American Music Fairness Act and the Living Wage for Musicians Act. And I want you to support the NO FAKES Act, the TRAIN Act, and the CLEAR Act.*"
2. **Ask the tough questions.** At town halls, on social media, in emails: "*Where do you stand on fair pay for musicians?*"
3. **Email me at issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com** and tell me what you've done. I'll feature your stories next month.

The summer is quiet in Washington—but quiet doesn't mean nothing is happening. It means the powerful are counting on us to look away.

Let's prove them wrong.





When Spotify Strikes: What to Do When Your Album Is Removed for "Artificial Streams"

A recent post in the ISSA Facebook group has struck a nerve—and for good reason. One of our members shared a devastating experience: Their most successful album was removed from Spotify after the platform flagged one of their tracks for "artificial streams." Despite exhaustive research proving the activity was organic, and despite reaching out to the distributor CD Baby, They're been unable to get the music reinstated.

Unfortunately, they are not alone. This scenario is playing out for more and more independent artists, and the frustration is mounting across the ISSA community.

The Problem: No Appeal, No Warning

Here's the hard truth that every independent artist needs to understand: **Spotify makes its own judgment about artificial streams and has no direct appeal process for artists**. When their system flags a track, the decision is final from the artist's perspective—you cannot call Spotify and plead your case.

When fraud is detected, Spotify charges distributors a penalty fee of approximately **$10–$11 per track per month**. Many distributors, including CD Baby, DistroKid, and TuneCore, pass these penalties directly to the artist. In more severe cases—or when a release is flagged repeatedly—the affected track or entire album is removed from the platform entirely.

And here's another gut punch: if a single track on an album is flagged, the **entire album** (the full UPC) is typically removed. As CD Baby's own support documentation states: "*It isn't possible to remove one track from an album from a partner, so if we remove a track, the full release/UPC it's associated with will be removed.*"

Why Switching Distributors Won't Help

Many artists' first instinct is to blame their distributor and switch to another provider. But as we stated, **switching distributors won't bring your album back**.

The flag follows the *content*, not the distributor. Spotify itself removed the album—it's not a CD Baby decision. A new distributor can't override that. And if you attempt to re-upload with new ISRC codes, you'll lose all your existing streams and playlist placements—with no guarantee the new upload won't get flagged again.

CD Baby is essentially the messenger in this situation, not the decision-maker. While they can escalate a case and request a manual review, they cannot reverse Spotify's determination.

What to Do If This Happens to You

If you receive an artificial streaming alert, **act quickly and methodically**:

1. Document everything immediately. Screenshot your Spotify for Artists dashboard (before and after stream counts), save all emails from Spotify and your distributor, and create a timeline of all promotional activities for the last 90 days. List every playlist, ad campaign, or promotional service you've used.

2. Escalate within your distributor. First-line support often can't help with these cases. Ask to speak with a specialist or supervisor. Provide all your documentation in an organized, professional manner and request that they escalate the case to higher-level contacts at Spotify for a manual review.

3. Pause all promotional activity immediately. Stop all paid advertising, playlist submission services, and third-party campaigns until the issue is resolved. This prevents any further flags while you're trying to sort things out.

4. Investigate the source of your streams. Review any marketing services you've used—especially those offering "guaranteed" streams. Even legitimate-looking PR firms can inadvertently trigger flags if their methods look suspicious to Spotify's algorithms. Warning signs of potentially fraudulent playlists include unusually high streams for unknown artists, low follower counts paired with high stream numbers, and misleading playlist names.

5. Consider consulting an entertainment attorney. If the financial impact is significant, professionals like **Krystle Delgado** (also known as "Miss Krystle")—an entertainment attorney, independent artist, and CEO of Delgado Entertainment Law—may be able to offer guidance. She understands both the artist's perspective and the legal complexities of these platform disputes.

The Bigger Picture: A Growing Crisis for Indie Artists

This isn't an isolated issue. Independent artists are increasingly being affected by fraudulent streams—and by the aggressive enforcement actions meant to stop them. In Spotify's fight against AI scams and streaming fraud, **indie artists are often collateral damage**.

Spotify itself recognizes that the takedown of authentic music due to unauthorized artificial streams is a legitimate issue. But recognition doesn't equal recourse. The system remains punitive, not conversational, and artists are left with few options.

The Takeaway

The most important thing you can do is **prevention**. Vet every promotional service carefully, avoid anyone promising "guaranteed" streams, and monitor your Spotify for Artists dashboard regularly for any unusual activity.

But if you do receive that dreaded alert: stay calm, document everything, escalate professionally through your distributor, and be prepared for the possibility that your music may not be reinstated.

This is the reality of the streaming era—and it's a conversation every independent artist needs to have.

Have you dealt with a similar situation? Share your experience in the ISSA Facebook group to help other members navigate this challenge.



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 a Beverage Tumbler and 2 Commemorative Lapel Pins**. These are legit – don't miss out.

Don’t Fall for the Scare Tactics: Your Indie Path to CMA Fest 2027

As Nashville hummed with the closing chords of CMA Fest 2026 (June 4–7), you’ve probably noticed a certain email making the rounds in your inbox. A PR agency is circulating a "2027 Agency Breakdown," pointing out that heavyweights like WME, CAA, and UTA represent the vast majority of this year’s headliners. Their not-so-subtle conclusion? If you don’t have a major firm behind you, you won’t get a slot—so you’d better sign with them... for *2027*.

Before you hit "reply" or pull out your credit card, let’s pause. This is classic fear-based marketing, and the timeline actually works in your favor. The 2027 application window for **CMA Fest 2027** hasn’t even opened yet. You have time, and more importantly, you have a direct path that doesn't require a high-priced middleman.

The Free Application (Yes, Really)
The Country Music Association (CMA) keeps the daytime performance application completely free and open to the public. When the 2027 submission portal opens (typically around late fall or early winter), any artist—indie, unsigned, or otherwise—can submit directly. No agency login required. No booking agent needed. The CMA specifically warns artists about scams and encourages direct applications through their official channels.

Reading the Fine Print on Those Statistics
That PR email is technically correct about one thing: WME (24%), CAA (19%), and UTA (14%) dominate the *nighttime* Nissan Stadium shows. But those are the stadium-filling headliners—Luke Bryan, Keith Urban, and Cody Johnson territory.
Here is the detail they conveniently left out: the **free daytime stages** (Riverfront, Dr. Pepper Amp, and various plaza stages) feature over 200 artists. This is where the festival actively hunts for fresh talent and emerging voices. These slots are filled with indie artists, local up-and-comers, and rising stars who applied directly and brought their A-game, not their agency roster.

Proof That Indie Artists Do It Every Year
Despite what the PR pitch implies, independent artists perform at CMA Fest annually. Priscilla Block performed as a relative unknown before she blew up. Allie Torto represented her hometown as an indie act. Travis Bolt used his daytime slot as a springboard to the Grand Ole Opry. None of these artists had a massive WME or CAA deal at the time of their acceptance. They had great songs, strong social proof, and a killer submission video.

The Real Cost-Benefit for 2027
Let's be brutally honest with each other: **is it worth it?** Yes, *if* you view it as a marketing and networking investment. You won't get paid for a daytime slot; in fact, you'll likely absorb the costs of your band, travel, and accommodations. But you *will* get massive industry exposure, a legitimate festival credit, and face-time with managers, labels, and press who swarm Nashville that week.

Do you need a large agency for 2027? Absolutely not. The application is free, and the CMA's selection committee is looking for talent, not a letterhead. However, you *do* need to bring your own momentum. In the current landscape, your streaming numbers, social media engagement, and a polished live video are what will make the jury stop scrolling.

Your 2027 Game Plan (Starting Now)
Spend the next several months doing what that PR agency *doesn't* want you to do: build your following organically, release strong music, and polish your 15-minute festival set. When the 2027 submission window opens this winter, apply directly. It's free, it's straightforward, and it puts the power back in your hands.

Note: That PR agency is selling access to a club you don't need to join. The country music industry is more democratized than ever, and CMA Fest's daytime stages are proof. Don't let a fear-driven email convince you that your dreams require a co-sign from a corporate giant. Your talent, your hustle, and a direct online application are still the most honest combination in Music City. Start preparing for 2027 now—the door is wide open.





Calling All EDM Artists & Producers: Your Global Community Awaits at ISSA!

The International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA) has always been a home for independent artists across every genre. From singer-songwriters and rock bands to hip-hop artists and beyond, our community of over **30,000 members worldwide** thrives on collaboration, support, and year-round visibility.

Now, we're turning up the BPM and sending a special invitation to the EDM community. Whether you're a producer crafting beats in your bedroom, a vocalist looking to push sonic boundaries, or a DJ headlining festivals – **ISSA is your platform.**

And we're not doing it alone. We're thrilled to announce that **Polyverse Music** – one of the main sponsors of the ISSA Summit – is partnering with us to recruit EDM artists and producers to the association. Together, we're building a bridge between the songwriting world and the electronic music revolution.

A Call to Our Current Members: Help Us Grow the EDM Community!

To our existing ISSA family: **we need your help!** We all know at least one or two EDM artists, producers, or DJs who would thrive in our community. Whether it's a friend, a collaborator, or someone you've been following online – **send them this article.**

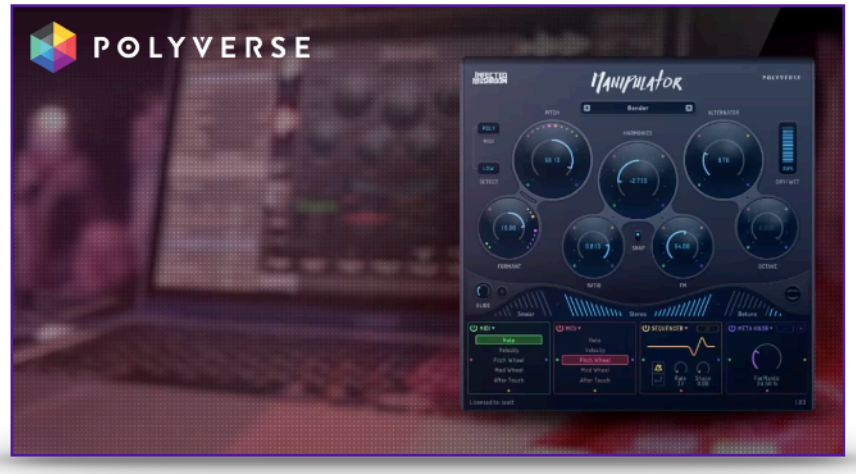
Let them know that ISSA is more than just an awards show. We're a **year-round support system** that offers free promotion, networking, industry connections, and opportunities that can elevate their careers. And with **Polyverse Music** joining us as a partner, we're building exciting new bridges to the electronic music world.

Share this invitation far and wide. Tag an EDM artist you know. Send them the link to join. Together, we can make ISSA the most diverse and vibrant independent music community on the planet.

Meet Our Partner: Polyverse – Award-Winning Plugin Innovators

We're proud to partner with **Polyverse Music**, an innovative plugin designer known for pushing the boundaries of sound. Their award-winning plugins are trusted by top producers and artists worldwide to create cutting-edge vocal effects, pitch manipulation, and sound design that defy convention.

Their flagship plugin, **Manipulator**, is a vocal processor that uses innovative granular algorithms to dramatically alter timbre and pitch – turning a simple vocal line into a complex, entrancing



Polyerse in the Spotlight: Moldover at The Grammy® Museum

We're incredibly excited to share that PolyVerse's Manipulator has been showcased in **The Grammy® Museum's interactive Sonic Playground** in Los Angeles. Spanning 3,000 sq ft, the exhibit features 17 installations designed to demystify music production.

The **Manipulator is located inside the Vocal Booth**, an installation where visitors can instantly change the pitch, texture, and character of their voices. The booth was created by artist, instrument maker, and longtime Polyverse user **Moldover**. He customized the studio software to be accessible for both children and adults without prior musical experience. The exhibit has been so successful that it was later duplicated for **The Musicians' Hall of Fame & Museum in Nashville**.



"When Polyverse released Manipulator, I got really excited because vocals are a crucial component of the music I make both as a songwriter and a producer for other artists," says Moldover.

Top Artists Trust PolyVerse

PolyVerse plugins aren't just for the pros – they're for **you**. Top vocal artists like **Priska** (Priscilla Liang), a Taiwanese-American singer/songwriter from Los Angeles, have discovered the power of PolyVerse. Her first experience with Manipulator opened up a new dimension in her music:

"When I tried out Manipulator – and this is the first time I've ever used an electronic plugin – it totally opened up a new dimension for me. In my mind, I was thinking about this song in a 3-dimensional scape instead of a 2-dimensional scape. It allowed me to manipulate my voice in different ways and also made me feel that I could put on a really big sounding show with only myself. I felt empowered."



Ready to Join the Movement?

Visit: www.issasongwriters.com to register for free.

Learn more about Polyverse: www.polyversemusic.com



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 a Beverage Tumbler and 2 Commemorative Lapel Pins**. These are legit – don't miss out.

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 again come from numerous ISSA members. Question: ***Now that I've retired, it feels like I've been ghosted and the music industry has a glass ceiling for senior artists.***

The Golden Era: Why 55+ is the Sweet Spot for Independent Artists

Let's cut right to the chase, because this question comes up every single month—and honestly, I'm glad it does, because my answer is always the same: **Absolutely not. You are not too old. In fact, you might just be at the perfect age.**

As someone staring down the barrel of 70 myself, I get it. When you look at the mainstream charts or the glossy magazine covers, it feels like the industry has a "glass ceiling" for gray hair. But here is the secret that the major labels don't want you to know: **The *Independent* music industry doesn't have a glass ceiling; it has a glass floor.** And you, my friend, are standing well above it.

Here is the truth: That "glass ceiling" is just a mirror reflecting the insecurities of younger artists who haven't lived enough life to write a truly gut-wrenching bridge. You have retired from the daily grind and now possess the three things every indie artist desperately needs: **Time, Wisdom, and Authenticity.**

Let's look at the bright side of being an artist over 55:

- **Your Life Experience is Your Hook:** You aren't writing about high school crushes or generic party anthems. You are writing about real love, real loss, real history, and real resilience. That resonates deeply with audiences of *all* ages, but especially with the 40+ demographic that actually has disposable income to buy merch, tickets, and vinyl.

- **You've Mastered Patience:** You aren't desperate for overnight fame. You understand that building a legacy takes time. This allows you to enjoy the *process*—the writing, the home-recording tinkering, the small intimate gigs—without the anxiety of a ticking clock.
- **Home Studio Savvy:** You've already solved the biggest hurdle—cost. By learning to set up your own home studio, you've taken control of your output. You are no longer beholden to the $200/hour studio clock. That isn't a setback; that is *artistic freedom*.

What to DO about it (The Upbeat Action Plan):

- **Lean into "Vintage":** Market yourself as a seasoned troubadour. Venues love pitching "An Evening with..." because it implies class and quality.
- **Target the Right Rooms:** Stop chasing 20-something dive bars. Look at wineries, listening rooms, private corporate events, yacht clubs, and house concerts. These bookers *prefer* mature artists who show up on time and treat the staff well.
- **Sync Licensing:** Your sound (often rooted in classic rock, folk, or traditional country) is *gold* for film and TV supervisors looking for nostalgia. Upload your catalog to music libraries.
- **Collaborate:** Don't be afraid to bring in a younger producer to remix your tracks. It keeps your sound fresh without changing your soul.

The Unspoken Career Killer: Protecting Your Brand from Polarization

Now, let's pivot to a topic that ties directly into the "why" behind some artists suddenly feeling ghosted. I recently spoke with a band who are incredibly talented, with a core fanbase over 60. They've noticed a steep drop in bookings over the last year and feel like they've been "ghosted" by the industry.

While age might be the excuse they reach for, I want to share a hard-won piece of wisdom that applies to *every* artist reading this—especially those enjoying their newfound retirement freedom.

You are a musician, not a pundit.

Your fans fell in love with your harmonies, your chord progressions, and the emotions you evoke when you play live. They did *not* fall in love with your political feed. *Send an email to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com with the word “Senior” to receive a free “Summit Raffle Coupon”.* In today's hyper-polarized climate, if you lean hard into *any* extreme on social media, you are playing a dangerous game of arithmetic.

Here is the simple math: If your core audience is over 60, roughly half of them will disagree with you on any given hot-button issue, no matter which side you choose. When you post aggressive political rants, you aren't "speaking your truth"—you are telling 50% of your paying customers that they aren't welcome in your audience anymore. That isn't a "glass ceiling"; that is a self-inflicted wound.

The Golden Rule of Longevity: Know Your Core & Protect the Sanctuary.

Your gigs and your music are a sanctuary. When people buy a ticket to your show, they are buying an escape from the 24-hour news cycle. They are buying *peace*.

What to DO about it (The Constructive Fix):

- **Compartmentalize:** Create a *private* Facebook profile for only your family and very close friends of your ideology where you can vent to your heart's content. Keep your *artist/business* page strictly about the craft—behind-the-scenes of your studio, songwriting tips, throwback photos, and upcoming gigs.
- **Check Your Feed Before You Post:** Ask yourself, "Does this bring my fans *closer* to my music, or does it push them away?" If it doesn't serve the song, don't post it.
- **Win Them Back:** If you've already gone down that road, it's not too late. Shift your content back to 100% music for the next three months. Share stories *about* your fans. Thank them by name. Remind them why they loved you in the first place. Trust can be rebuilt.



The Bottom Line:
You haven't been ghosted by fate; you've simply given your audience a reason to walk away. The good news? You have the microphone, the platform, and the free time to pivot. Choose to be the artist who unites a room through melody, rather than divides them through ideology. Your legacy will thank you.

Keep writing, keep recording, and remember—the best is yet to come.

10 Months, 30,000 Members, and One Blue Dot: Why This Is the Moment to Bet on Yourself



It's hard to believe that 10 months ago, we started the initial planning for this year's ISSA Summit and Awards Show. When I retired from my previous life three years ago, I truly believed I'd spend my days in the studio, quietly working on putting out new music. I never dreamed my daily routine would look like *this*: scouring music news in an industry that evolves faster than the weather, working behind the scenes with the world's best radio show host to produce what I believe are the two best weekly shows out there, answering a flood of emails from our artists, working on the endless behind-the-scenes logistics of our Awards Show and Summit, and writing this newsletter—which has grown so large it rivals a magazine (though I still call it a newsletter because it's packed with the news I hope actually helps you).

And yes, in between all that, I'm putting the finishing touches on my own new album. And like every other artist, I'm convinced it's "my best work to date." Not bad for someone who, at this age, many would say is "too old" for an industry that supposedly favors youth. (I hope you caught that article earlier in this issue about *never* being too old for this business.)

The funny thing is, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I love every minute of it. Being a member of the greatest association in the world—and being able to support all of you amazing artists—is a privilege I don't take lightly.

But I digress…

Right now, we are in that exhilarating, heart-pounding stretch where the finish line is in sight. Yes, there are still a few loose ends to tie up, but when I look at what we've accomplished, I can say with absolute confidence that this is going to be the best Awards Show week yet.

As you perused this month's newsletter, I hope you could feel that excitement jumping off the pages. We started with a complete breakdown of Awards Show week—a full schedule and description of every moment from August 20–22.

We announced the return of Grammy®-winning producer Alexx Antaeus, who is generously offering one-on-one sessions to help cover Summit expenses. We packed in **9 pages** of Summit Session information, put the spotlight on our July Spotlight Artist Emily Judson, and shared invaluable wisdom from Botte's Tip, Angela's Tip, and Rick Spins' sage advice on navigating the murky waters of pay-to-play and charts.

We also dove deep into the trenches with **7 pages of Industry News**, a **3-page update** on critical bills moving through Congress, and—of course—Spotify's latest shenanigans, which somehow required another 3 pages just to unpack. We even gave you a sneak peek at CMA Fest 2027. And we closed it all out with a heartfelt question from a member that hit home about the fears of being "too old" to make it.

If you take one thing away from this issue, I hope it's this: **ISSA is not just an awards show.** We are an association dedicated and committed to helping every single member grow and prosper —365 days a year. This newsletter is proof of that commitment.

But now, I need to talk to you about the elephant in the room: Blue Dot Fever.

It's almost as much of a buzz topic as AI these days. Ask any of the major acts who are canceling tours this summer. Yes, Blue Dot Fever is a very real thing—a combination of economic strain, rising costs, and the general summer slump that makes artists want to throw in the towel, stay home, and play it safe.

But here's the truth: while some acts are canceling, *other* acts are actually *succeeding* this summer. The how and why are simple. Those who want to win will find a way to win. They work a bit harder to reach their fans. They give their audiences a little more value for their money. They make cuts, they make sacrifices, and ultimately, they survive.

So what does that have to do with *you*? Specifically, the artist who is on the fence about coming to Atlanta?

What's your reason for hesitating? Are the costs too high? Are you having a hard time justifying the investment? I know times are tough. I get it. But have you truly looked at the *hidden* values of what happens in Atlanta versus the upfront cost? Or are you using Blue Dot Fever as an excuse, willing to become a victim of your circumstances?

These are the moments when you have to buckle down and take a chance on yourself. Because if you don't, who will? The glass is truly half full—but only if you choose to see it that way. Don't let a temporary slump rob you of a permanent opportunity.

Speaking of half full—let's talk about AI.

Last year, while sitting around the courtyard at the hotel, the topic of AI came up. Back then, it felt like a distant concept. We knew it was happening, and we knew it might affect us, but we didn't realize just how fast it would come at us. We didn't foresee that "artists" (and I use that term loosely) who don't play instruments or write songs would type a few prompts into a laptop and suddenly be stealing streams from real musicians like you.

A few months ago, I looked at AI and saw a glass half empty for the entire music industry. I wondered how long it would be before we were all out of jobs. But deep down, I held onto hope.

And in the past few months, that hope has been validated. A groundswell of *real* artists has risen up, recognizing just how dangerous unchecked AI can be. I'm starting to see the AI glass as half *empty* of momentum—and losing steam every day. Real music is fighting back. We can't get rid of AI, but *we* will define what is right and what is wrong when it comes to music and technology.

And that brings me full circle.

ISSA is not just a pretty awards show. It is one of the best, most credible awards shows for independent artists *because* we are an association first. We are here to help you navigate the Blue Dot Fever, to arm you against the encroachment of AI, and to guide you through whatever else this wild industry throws our way.

Whether it's through this newsletter, our upcoming Summit, or our daily support, we are in your corner.

On that note—thank you for reading another chapter of this journey. I hope to see your face in Atlanta on August 20–22. Let's prove that the human spirit, real talent, and genuine connection will always win.

See you there.

— **Todd**





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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.