The Summit Newsletter

Merry Christmas

As the holiday season fills the air with joy and harmony, we want to take a moment to extend our warmest wishes to every member of the International Singer Songwriters Association. This time of year reminds us of the beauty of connection, and what better way to celebrate than with the incredible bond we share as a musical family. Together, we've created not just melodies and lyrics, but a community that uplifts, inspires, and supports one another through every note and every verse.



Music has a way of bringing people together, and within ISSA, we've built something truly special—a family united by passion, creativity, and the love of song. As you gather with loved ones this Christmas, may your hearts be filled with the same warmth and joy that your music brings to the world. Thank you for being an essential part of this vibrant community. Here's to a season of peace, love, and harmony, and to another year of making music that touches lives. Merry Christmas!

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.



🎁 ISSA's Annual Toys for Tots Guitar Raffle & Toy Drive is Underway!

The holiday season is here, and the International Singer-Songwriters Association is once again honored to support the U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots program with our annual **ISSA Guitar Raffle & Toy Drive**—a tradition that brings joy, generosity, and music to children who need it most.

This year's fundraiser is already buzzing with excitement, and we're inviting every ISSA member, supporter, and friend to join us in making a real difference for families this holiday season.

🎸 Win a Brand-New Yamaha Guitar from Sweetwater Music!

Thanks to the generosity of **Sweetwater Music**, one lucky supporter will take home a **brand-new Yamaha guitar**—the perfect holiday gift for yourself or a musician in your life.

Every raffle ticket you purchase puts **your name into the official ISSA fishbowl**, giving you a chance to win big *while helping children even bigger*.

🗓️ Important Dates

- **Ticket Sales End:** *December 4th*
  This deadline allows us extra time for holiday toy shopping with the proceeds.
- **Live Facebook Drawing:** *December 6th*
  Join us LIVE on the ISSA Facebook page as we draw the winning ticket and celebrate everyone who participated.
- **Toy Delivery:** *December 6th at Noon*
  Immediately after the live drawing, ISSA will deliver a truckload of toys to the Toys for Tots drop-off location—thanks to the incredible generosity of our members.

🎁 Why It Matters

For many children, Toys for Tots is the only source of holiday gifts they'll receive. Every ticket you purchase helps ISSA buy more toys, fill more wish lists, and bring more smiles to children across our community.

This fundraiser has become one of our most cherished holiday traditions—uniting our international family of artists, songwriters, and supporters in the true spirit of giving.

💗 How You Can Help

- Purchase raffle tickets before **December 4th**
- Share the raffle with your friends, fans, and fellow musicians
- Watch the live drawing on **December 6th**
- Celebrate with us as we deliver the toys that YOU helped provide!

Let's make this year our biggest, brightest, and most generous toy drive yet.
Together, we can make holiday magic happen—one toy and one ticket at a time.

Thank you for being part of the ISSA family and for helping us bring joy to children who need it most this season.

Deja-vu??

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

Shuttle Bus Coordinator Needed

We still are in need of someone to assume the responsibilities of procuring and coordinating the Shuttle Bus for this year's Summit. Your responsibilities will be to issue "Request For Quotes" from transportation companies. Then to select and procure the best company. You will also be responsible for coordinating a schedule with attendees. If this is a task that you would like to take on, please email Angela Marie Eidenmiller or Todd Apfel. We can supply you with names and contacts at the companies we considered and worked with last year.



SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

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

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



Each Stogie Joe guitar is a one-of-a-kind, handcrafted instrument.

The guitars are traditional three and four-string cigar box guitars. The necks are hard maple, hand-carved with a "C" profile. and have a traditional headstock, as well as sealed tuners. The guitars can be tuned to open G, open E or open D.

Fretboards are walnut, Bolivian rosewood, padauk, wenge or purpleheart with medium/medium nickel-silver frets and a jumbo zero fret.

I have found that humbucker pickups (dual blade or "traditional") sound best.

A pickup sounds its best with as few items between the output jack and the amp. That's why Stogie Joe guitars have just a volume knob.

Learning to play a cigar box guitar is easy and they are fun to play, whether you are a beginner or experienced player.

If you are looking for a unique instrument for yourself or a gift for a musician friend/family member, a Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitar is an excellent choice.

Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars

1248 Jefferson Street South
Shakopee, MN 55379
(619) 663-4730
David@stogiejoeguitars.com



Seeking Sponsors for the 2026 Summit

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

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



Mid-Winter Retreat

During one of the recent Rick Spins radio broadcasts it was brought up in the chat that we should have a Mid-Winter Retreat. What do you think?

* Should we have one? If so..
* When? We were thinking a Thursday night through Sunday, sometime in January or February.
* Where? We had two suggestions, both were for Florida.

In the past month we had just 2 people show any interest in this. Instead of just dropping this completely, we're going to give this one more try…

For this to happen this winter, we need to get this coordinated as soon as possible. So if this is of interest to you, please get back to us ASAP with you "when" and "where" suggestions!

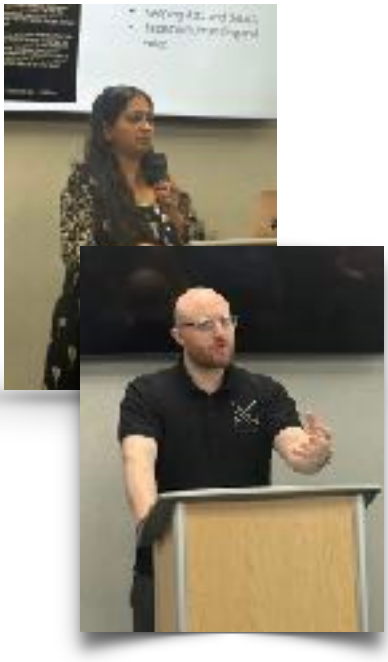


Tamanie's Notes

Many independent artists are becoming increasingly aware that some awards shows operate primarily on ticket sales and fees, without offering long-term value, credibility, or support. Several organizations have faced public concerns regarding financial practices and inconsistent benefits for artists. These situations can ultimately hurt indie musicians who are simply looking for legitimate recognition.

In contrast, the **International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA)** continues to stand out as one of the most reputable organizations in the indie music world. Membership is **100% free**, the awards are **high-quality and professionally produced**, and ISSA provides **year-round support, education, promotion, and opportunities at no cost**. Because ISSA is a **Registered Media Company**, artists frequently use it as a **credible stepping-stone toward Grammys submissions and other industry pathways**. Its global reputation for professionalism, transparency, and artist advocacy remains unmatched in the independent sector

Breakout Sessions & Keynote Speakers



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

Last month We asked each of you to think of topics that you'd like to see addressed and then think about who would be a good candidate to speak on that topic (yes it can be yourself). Then take those ideas and send an email to Angela Marie Eidenmiller or Todd Apfel.

So far we've only received 2 topic suggestions and one speaker abstract. We can't emphasize how important it is to get these suggestions to us asap, as many speakers book their engagements 8-12 months in advance.

Tips From Our Members

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



Just One Tip

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

This month is all about Spotify Radio Algorithmic Playlist.

Spotify Radio is an algorithmic playlist feature that creates a continuous stream of music based on a starting point, such as a song, artist, album, or playlist. Here's a breakdown of how it works:

1. Spotify's algorithm analyzes the characteristics of the starting point (e.g., genre, style, mood).

2. It then generates a playlist of similar songs from its vast library.

3. The playlist is personalized, meaning it's tailored to the individual user's listening habits and preferences.

Here is my "Michael Botte Band Radio Algorithmic playlist that Spotify made for me: **https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1E4xHoCmcudwCF**
It essentially chose about six songs from my catalog and coupled them with what Spotify thinks are "similar artists". This is a great place to find collab opportunities and develop relationships with fellow artists.

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

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

Thank you, family



Sam George - Dolby Atmos: A New Canvas for the Modern Songwriter

The first time I heard a song unfold in Dolby Atmos, it felt less like listening to a mix and more like stepping into a world. Not a bigger version of stereo, not a clever trick, but something different in nature. It was the moment I realized that immersive audio is not a format upgrade, it is a creative frontier.

For songwriters and artists, this matters. We are living in a time when the way people experience music is expanding faster than the conversations around it. Most discussions about Atmos revolve around numbers, speakers, and software, but none of that addresses the question creators actually care about: what does this mean for the art?

Atmos opens a canvas that works with the way music is felt, not just the way it is heard. Instead of squeezing every idea into a flat left-right picture, you suddenly have height, depth, distance, and presence. Space becomes part of the instrument. Silence becomes a tool, not a compromise. Contrast becomes more drama)c, intimacy becomes more personal, and emo)on becomes more physical.

A whispered vocal can sit close enough to feel like breath on your skin. A harmony can surround you the way voices do in a real room. A string line can rise above the listener, lifting the tension in a way that stereo can only suggest. A chorus can open outwards rather than upwards, creating the kind of expansion that gives a listener goosebumps even when they don’t know why.

For writers, this means something powerful. Atmos gives you room to design experience, not just arrange parts. It lets you guide the listener’s attention with intention instead of volume. It allows stories to unfold in three dimensions. When you write with a wider canvas in mind, the relationship between lyric, melody, and space becomes a new kind of creative conversation.

And here is the important part: you do not need to write differently to benefit from it. Good songwriting remains good songwriting. Atmos simply gives your ideas more room to breathe and more ways to move the listener. It amplifies creativity rather than replacing it, and that is why it is worth paying attention to.

Of course, this is only one side of the discussion. Immersive audio also brings new opportunities for connection that mirror how we experience sound in the real world, and it offers artists a way to future-proof their work as platforms continue to evolve. But those are conversations for another day.

For now, it is enough to recognize that immersive audio is not an engineer's playground. It is a
songwriter's blank page, wide open and waiting. The artists who explore it early won't just sound different, they will feel different. And in a world full of noise, feeling is the one thing that always cuts through.

Sam is a Studio Owner at Mammoth Sound Studio, and Artist / Composer at Pick Up Goliath.
http://www.mammothsoundstudio.com/
https://www.pickupgoliath.com/

Odds-N-Ends

The ISSA and the Summit is all about you, the "Artist! What helps us grow is when you give us your feedback. So here's your chance! If there is something that you feel will help out the ISSA, the ISSA Awards Show or the ISSA Summit, well… all you have to do is send either Angela Marie Eidenmiller or Todd Apfel an email and we will definitely take your suggestions into consideration. Remember, there is no such thing as a bad idea, as ideas are what created both the ISSA and the ISSA Summit!





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.

OWN YOUR AUDIENCE: The One Truth Every Independent Musician Must Accept

Let's be brutally honest with each other for a moment: most musicians today are building their careers on land they don't own. We pour hours into creating Reels, TikToks, Stories, and posts — hoping the algorithm grants us a few fleeting seconds of visibility. We chase trends, optimize captions, and study analytics, all while quietly ignoring a harsh but undeniable truth: you do not own your audience on social media. Your followers are not guaranteed to see your work. Your content is not permanent. And your access to your own community is always conditional—granted or withheld by a platform that can change the rules overnight.

When you step back and look at the landscape clearly, the difference between your social followers and your email subscribers becomes impossible to ignore. They are not the same currency. On social media, you are operating on rented land. The platform decides who sees your posts—often less than 5% of the people who chose to follow you. Your message disappears in hours, swallowed by an endless feed. Monetization is indirect, clunky, and heavily restricted, relying on outbound links, swipe-ups, and platform fees. Even accessibility itself is fragile; if your account is flagged, hacked, frozen, or algorithmically buried, your entire connection to your supporters can vanish instantly, through no fault of your own.

Your email list is the opposite. Your email list is owned land. It is the only piece of digital real estate where you have complete control over your message, your audience, your access, and your ability to earn. When someone gives you their email address, they're not simply following you—they're granting you direct permission to speak to them. That address is yours until they unsubscribe. You can download it. You can move it. You can take it with you. If the internet breaks tomorrow, you still have it. And unlike social media, email consistently delivers the highest conversion rates in the entire music industry. A single $10 album sale or $15 t-shirt will earn you more than tens of thousands of streams—and email is where those sales actually happen.

Think of it this way: when you send an email, your message goes directly into the fan's inbox. It is guaranteed delivery. When you post on Instagram or TikTok, you are dropping a message into a chaotic public square and hoping someone notices. The distinction is everything. One is predictable. One is not. One is yours. One is borrowed.

If you need proof of the power of owning your audience, look at the strategy executed by Sons of Legion (SØL), one of the smartest independent case studies of the last decade. They didn't just go viral on TikTok—they harnessed that discovery strategically. At the peak of their viral moment, instead of telling fans to "go stream our song," they offered their entire unreleased EP for free in exchange for one thing: an email address and a phone number. What looked like a "free download" was actually a high-value trade, a deliberate, calculated move to convert momentary interest into long-term ownership. Their sign-up page wasn't a transaction; it was an initiation. Fans weren't just getting music—they were joining the Legion. They were becoming insiders.

So when the EP finally released commercially, SØL didn't pray for the algorithm. They pressed "send," and their community activated. Multiple songs charted in the iTunes Top 100 simultaneously—an unheard-of result for a new independent act. That chart moment didn't happen because of luck. It happened because they built the infrastructure to catch the virality. They had a portable, protected, loyal audience ready to show up, purchase, download, and share the moment they were asked. One email did what thousands of social posts could never accomplish.

This is the model independent artists need to adopt right now. Not later. Not eventually. Now. Because your email list is not just a safety net—it is your creative headquarters. It's where you can finally be human again. Social media demands performance: perfect lighting, perfect timing, perfect trends. Email rewards honesty and connection. You can write about your writer's block, your messy demo, the show that went badly, or the song that changed you. You can send a private voice memo, a behind-the-scenes photo, or a raw confession. You can speak directly to the people who have said, "Yes, I want to hear from you," without worrying about whether the algorithm approves.

And no—you don't have to spam anyone. A newsletter doesn't need to be long or complicated. A great email can be three sentences: "Here's a demo I'm working on. I hope it finds you in a good moment. More soon." What matters is consistency, honesty, and value. Offer things your social followers can't access. Give early previews, exclusive content, or small pieces of your creative world. Make being on your email list feel like being part of your inner circle.

This is the funnel strategy that actually works: use social media for discovery, but convert that discovery into ownership. Let social media be the spark, but let email be the fire. Post raw, real content on the platforms you don't own, but direct the most interested people to a simple landing page where they can join your community. Offer something valuable in exchange—a private EP, a demo pack, a live acoustic session, a voice memo library. Name your community so it feels like a tribe rather than a list. And when the time comes for a release or a tour or a merch drop, give your people a mission. Invite them to help you hit the charts, sell out a show, or push a pre-save goal. People love being part of the win when they feel like the win is theirs, too.

Stop building your entire career on land owned by Meta, Google, or ByteDance. Stop letting an algorithm decide your fate. Social media is a tool, not a home. It is the billboard—not the community center. It is discovery—not conversion. The moment you begin treating every new email subscriber as your most valuable asset, you shift from fragile to resilient, from reactive to strategic, from rented to owned. Your future as an independent musician depends on one thing: whether you continue chasing someone else's algorithm, or begin building the foundation you can actually stand on. So the real question becomes: what are you willing to offer in exchange for the one thing that can truly change your career—an email address from a fan who cares enough to stay? Your legion is waiting. Give them a door to walk through.

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

Happy Holidays Y'all
See ya next year in 2026!

— Your ISSA Sis,
Angela Marie Eidenmiller
Email Angela your feedback, questions, and suggestions for subjects you'd like to see in upcoming articles.
ISSAsongwriters.angela@gmail.com

