The Summit Newsletter

FINAL CALL: Less Than One Month Left to Nominate Yourself for the 2026 ISSA Awards!



Time is running out!
Have you filled out your 2026 ISSA Award Show nomination forms yet? If not, you need to act fast. The self-nomination period officially closes at **noon on March 30th**. This is your chance to step into the spotlight and claim your place among the best in the industry.
For those who meet the eligibility criteria—including having a dedicated website, at least five songs available on major platforms (iTunes/Spotify), and an engaged fan base—the path to recognition starts with a single click. Your fans are your greatest asset; their support is crucial in helping you advance to the finalist stage. After our team reviews all submissions, the official nominees will be announced on **April 2**, kicking off a month of fan voting from April 2 through April 30.

Why Should You Nominate Yourself?
The ISSA Awards are the premier coveted awards for Independent Artists! Winning isn't just about receiving a beautiful crystal award; it's about joining an elite group of performers. This achievement opens doors to incredible opportunities, including **Grammy Consideration, International Exposure, potential placement on the ISSA Record Label, and the ability to add your achievement to the IMDB Database.**

Here is what happens next:
- **Nomination Period Closes:** March 30 @ Noon
- **Finalists Announced:** April 2
- **Fan Voting Round: April 2 – April 30**

Here's a snapshot of what's ahead in the coming months:

- **Nominations** (Ends March 30th at noon)
- **Preparing your fans & followers for voting** (March)
- **Reserve your hotel rooms** (We will make a special announcement when the ISSA Host Hotel room block is available)
- **Make your travel reservations** (March)
- **Fan Voting** (April)
- **Finalists Announced** (May)
- **Judging Round begins** (May)



This Month's Focus: Your First Two Steps to Success

1. Have you submitted your nomination form yet?
If not—why wait? Even if you're unsure whether your music is "award-ready," remember that the ISSA Awards Show & Summit is the *premiere event* to network and learn from fellow artists, industry specialists, and executives. Don't miss your chance to be where it happens!

👉 **[Submit your nomination here: https://issasongwriters.com/2026-nomination-form/]**

2. Start preparing your fans NOW!
The moment you hit submit, your work isn't over—it's just beginning. Download your nominee graphics (available on the site) and start talking to your family, friends, and followers about voting in April. The sooner you engage them, the easier it will be to mobilize votes when the polls open.
Let's make this your year to shine.
Stay tuned for more updates, and as always, we're here to help you every step of the way.
Go to www.issasongwriters.com and click on the "Self Nominations Form" tab today!



YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: A CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE ON FAIR PAY FOR MUSICIANS

For independent musicians, the business of music often takes a backseat to the art of creating it. But if there is one business issue we should all be watching closely right now, it's the fight for fair streaming revenues. Whether you release your music on Qobuz, Tidal, Apple Music, or Spotify, the rates per stream vary wildly, leaving most artists struggling to make ends meet.

The good news? Congress is finally paying attention. Currently, there are two significant pieces of legislation working their way through the House of Representatives: **The American Music Fairness Act** and **The Living Wage For Musicians Act**. While they are often discussed in the same breath, they target different parts of the compensation problem. Understanding the difference is key to advocating effectively.

The Difference Between the Bills

While it would be ideal to combine these into one sweeping piece of legislation, they remain separate bills with distinct goals. Here is a breakdown of what each one does:

1. The American Music Fairness Act (AMFA)

- **The Goal:** To close a decades-old loophole in U.S. copyright law.
- **The Issue:** Did you know that when AM/FM radio plays a song, the **songwriter** gets paid, but the **recording artist and record label** get absolutely nothing? Terrestrial radio currently exploits an exemption that allows them to use recorded music as "free content" to sell advertising against.
- **The Fix:** The AMFA aims to establish a performance royalty for artists and copyright holders when their music is played on over-the-air radio. This levels the playing field, ensuring that when a small or independent artist gets played on a local station, they finally receive a paycheck for that airplay, just like they do on satellite or internet radio.

2. The Living Wage For Musicians Act

- **The Goal:** To restructure how streaming services pay artists, establishing a viable minimum wage for music creators.
- **The Issue:** The current "pro-rata" streaming model pools all subscription money together. After the major labels take their massive cuts, the remaining pool is split among rights holders. This system overwhelmingly favors top-tier pop stars, leaving independents with fractions of a penny per stream.
- **The Fix:** This bill proposes a new per-stream rate (set at one cent per stream) and establishes a new payment system that isn't based on market share. It is designed to ensure that streaming revenue is distributed more equitably, allowing working musicians to actually earn a living from their fanbase, regardless of whether they have millions of monthly listeners.

Where Do the Bills Stand?

As of this writing, both bills have been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, they are currently stuck in the early stages, awaiting review by subcommittees.

The biggest hurdle? These bills currently lack the strong bi-partisan support needed to advance. Furthermore, the radio industry is fighting the AMFA fiercely, and the major streaming platforms are naturally resistant to the structural changes proposed in the Living Wage Act.

How You Can Help (And Why It Matters Now)

We cannot afford to wait. This fall, **all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives** are up for election. This creates a massive opportunity for us—the voters—to make fair pay for musicians a campaign issue.

Here is your action plan:

1. Contact Your Representative.

Find your specific US Congressman and call their office. It takes five minutes. Tell them you are a constituent and a musician, and you want them to publicly support both the *American Music Fairness Act* and the *Living Wage For Musicians Act*. Let them know this isn't just about big stars; it's about the economic survival of working musicians in their district.

2. Organize with ISSA.
You don't have to fight this battle alone. Contact your **ISSA State Representative**. (You can find them on the ISSA website under the "Worldwide Reps" tab). Ask them to organize a state-wide push. If we can coordinate letters to the editor, phone calls, and emails from every ISSA member in a given district, we become a voting bloc that cannot be ignored.

3. Ask the Tough Questions.
As we approach the election season, candidates will be asking for your vote. Find out where they stand. Use social media, attend town halls, or ask your ISSA State Rep to send out questionnaires. Ask every candidate: *Do you support fair pay for musicians? Will you push for a vote on these bills?* Your voice matters. Your vote matters. Let's make sure that this fall, the message from the music community is heard loud and clear in Washington. Let's get these bills passed.

Stay tuned to the ISSA Summit newsletter and social media for updates on these bills and coordinated action dates!

The ISSA Awards Are Now on IMDb — What This Means for Our Members



The International Singer-Songwriters Association is proud to announce a major milestone: **the ISSA Awards are now officially listed on IMDb**, the world's most recognized entertainment industry database.

This is an exciting development not only for ISSA as an organization, but also for **every artist, performer, presenter, finalist, and winner who has participated in the ISSA Awards show.**

For those unfamiliar, **IMDb (Internet Movie Database)** is the global standard reference for film, television, and entertainment productions. Industry professionals, media outlets, casting agents, producers, journalists, and fans around the world use IMDb to research productions and the people involved in them.

Being listed on IMDb places the ISSA Awards alongside major entertainment events and productions and allows the incredible talent within our community to be **officially documented and credited in a professional industry database.**

You can view the ISSA Awards listing here:
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt40140082/

Why This Matters for ISSA Members

Because the ISSA Awards show is now officially cataloged on IMDb, **members who participated in the show may be eligible to receive an official IMDb credit.**

That means your participation in the show can become a **recognized entertainment credit**, visible to industry professionals worldwide.

This can be valuable for:

- **Building your professional entertainment résumé**
  - **Strengthening your public artist profile**
  - **Adding verified industry credits**
  - **Increasing credibility when pitching media, festivals, and bookings**
  - **Enhancing your IMDb personal page if you already have one**

Many artists and performers use IMDb credits when applying for industry opportunities, press features, film or TV work, and collaborations.

Who May Be Eligible for IMDb Credits

Members who participated in the ISSA Awards show in roles such as the following may qualify for a listing:

- Award winners
  - Award finalists
  - Performers
  - Presenters
  - Featured guests
  - Hosts
  - Production contributors

Essentially, **anyone who appeared on stage or contributed to the production of the filmed awards show** may be able to receive a credit.



How Members Can Get Their Name Listed

IMDb operates as an editorial database, which means credits must be **submitted and approved through their system.**
Members can request to be added by submitting their information through the IMDb contribution system.

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Go to the ISSA Awards IMDb page: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt40140082/
2. Scroll to the bottom of the page.
3. Click **"Edit Page."**
4. Select the appropriate category where your name should appear (for example: *Self*, *Performer*, *Thanks*, etc.).
5. Enter your name and role connected to the ISSA Awards.
6. Submit the update for review.

IMDb moderators will review the submission and approve it if it meets their verification guidelines. Once approved, your credit will appear on the ISSA Awards page and may also appear on **your personal IMDb page**.

If You Don't Yet Have an IMDb Page

That's perfectly fine.

When a credit is approved, **IMDb can automatically generate a new page for you** as an industry professional.

This means your participation in the ISSA Awards can become **your first IMDb credit**, opening the door for future entertainment credits as your career continues to grow.

A Milestone for the ISSA Community

Getting the ISSA Awards officially listed on IMDb took weeks of preparation and submission work, and it represents another step forward in raising the profile of the incredible artists within our association.

Our mission has always been to **create meaningful opportunities and recognition for independent singer-songwriters**, and this addition helps document and celebrate the achievements of our members on a global platform. We encourage all eligible participants from the show to take advantage of this opportunity and submit their credits.

Your talent deserves to be recognized and recorded.

View the Official Listing

Visit the ISSA Awards on IMDb here:
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt40140082/

Congratulations to everyone who helped make the ISSA Awards such a powerful celebration of independent music.
And now, thanks to IMDb, **that celebration is part of the global entertainment record.**

New 2026 Awards Show & Summit Items Available In The ISSA Store



ISSA Awards 2026 Tee Shirt

Have you checked out the ISSA Store lately? There are a lot of cool new items, including:



2026 ISSA Summit Tee Shirt



Embroidered 2026 Summit Cap

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

https://issasongwriters.com/store/

March Artist Poll

This month's artist poll is for Female Modern Country Artist of The Month. Please click the link below and vote daily for your favorite ISSA male modern country artist.

https://issasongwriters.com/poll/



The Sound of Ownership: Why True Independence in Music Matters Now More Than Ever

The image of the struggling artist waiting for a major label to bestow a life-changing contract is becoming a relic of the past. In 2025, the balance of power in the music industry has fundamentally shifted. True independence for musicians isn't just a viable path; it is a powerful and necessary movement reshaping the sonic and economic landscape.

This shift is driven by a new reality where the tools of success are no longer locked behind boardroom doors. The collapse of traditional gatekeeping, fueled by digital distribution and an influx of venture capital into music tech, has leveled the playing field. An artist in a bedroom studio can now reach a global audience with the same ease as a major label act. This new market dynamic isn't just about access; it's about autonomy. It allows artists to move with flexibility and speed, unencumbered by corporate bureaucracy, answering only to their creative vision.

This autonomy is paying dividends, literally. The economic argument for independence has never been stronger. Independent artists now command a staggering ***46.7%*** of the global recorded music market. This isn't just a niche segment; it's a dominant force, proving that a decentralized, artist-led ecosystem can generate immense revenue. It signifies a major reallocation of power and profit away from a concentrated few and back to the creators themselves.

However, navigating this new landscape of opportunity comes with its own set of challenges. While the gates are open, the path is still a road that artists must build themselves. This is where the power of community and support systems becomes vital.

Organizations like the **International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA)** are stepping in to ensure that the 30,000-plus independent artists who make up our membership don't have to walk that path alone. ISSA provides a crucial bridge between creative autonomy and professional success, offering networking opportunities, educational resources, and industry recognition specifically tailored for the independent community. By fostering a collaborative environment, they help turn the dream of sustainable independence into a practical reality for tens of thousands of singer-songwriters worldwide.

But the importance of this movement extends beyond balance sheets and support networks. True independence fosters a different kind of success—one built on genuine connection. Without the pressure to engineer a viral moment for a label's quarterly report, independent artists are free to focus on the long game: building real communities. They can cultivate deep, sustainable relationships with fans based on trust and shared passion, a far more resilient foundation than the fleeting nature of a viral stream. Groups like ISSA amplify this by creating spaces where these artists can connect not just with fans, but with each other, sharing strategies and encouragement that fuel long-term careers.

At its core, this new wave is driven by a demand for ethics, fairness, and transparency. The indie ecosystem is built on principles that prioritize the well-being of artists, offering fairer deals and clearer insights into revenue streams. This commitment to integrity is essential for a healthy, sustainable industry where creators are treated as partners, not products. By advocating for artist rights and providing a collective voice for thousands of its members, ISSA helps champion these very principles, ensuring that the business side of music evolves to respect the art it is meant to serve.

Ultimately, the call for independence is a call for ownership. It's about artists controlling their masters, their brand identity, and their destiny. This ownership provides the long-term sustainability and creative freedom necessary to build a lasting legacy, rather than a disposable hit. With the backing of a strong community like ISSA, that ownership becomes even more powerful, giving artists the collective strength to negotiate, learn, and grow on their own terms.

The future of music isn't being dictated from the top down; it's being built from the ground up. By embracing independence and banding together in supportive communities, artists are not just making music—they are fostering creativity, championing sustainability, and building a more equitable and vibrant industry for everyone.



The Stogie Joe Story

For David "Stogie Joe" Plekkenpol, music has always been a "first love" starting with classical piano at a very young age, playing trumpet and baritone in the school band, and picking up his first guitar at age 12. Over time, that passion for music has led to learning to play 12 different instruments.

The interest in cigar box guitars grabbed David when he saw Samantha Fish playing her famed Stogie Blues Box cigar box guitar. The bluesy, gutsy sound hit me straight in the heart. Dave was hooked and knew he had to start building cigar box guitars.

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.

Dave has 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.



We will be raffling off this guitar at the 2026 ISSA Summit, but why wait until August, go to stogiejoeguitars.com and order yours today!



Music Industry News!

News From Around The World That Affects All Of Us

Lawsuit Over AI and Song Lyrics Hits a Roadblock

Last month we reported about the lawsuit Universal Music Group / Concord Music Group versus Anthropic. This is an update to that lawsuit.

A recent court ruling has dealt a setback to major music publishers in their copyright battle against the AI company Anthropic, the creator of the Claude chatbot.

The Core Dispute

The music publishers (including companies like Concord and Universal) sued Anthropic, making two main arguments:

1. **Training:** Anthropic illegally used their copyrighted song lyrics to train its AI models.
2. **Output:** The Claude AI tool sometimes generates and displays those copyrighted lyrics when prompted by users.

The publishers wanted a court order (a preliminary injunction) to immediately stop Anthropic from using their lyrics for training.

What the Judge Decided

The judge ruled against the music publishers on two key requests, at least for now.

1. **No Immediate Injunction (Stop Order)**
   The judge denied the request for a preliminary injunction. The reasons were:
   - **Too Broad:** The order the publishers wanted would have covered hundreds of thousands of songs (including future ones), and it wasn't clear how Anthropic could realistically follow it. It placed an unfair burden on the company.
   - **No "Irreparable Harm" Proved:** To get an emergency order, the publishers had to show they were suffering immediate and serious harm that money couldn't fix later. The judge found they didn't prove this. The main harm they pointed to (the AI spitting out lyrics) had already been addressed because Anthropic voluntarily agreed to put safeguards in place. Their other claims about losing money or reputation were too vague or speculative.

2. **Key Claims Dismissed**
The judge also dismissed two specific legal claims the publishers made:

- **Secondary Infringement (Contributory and Vicarious):** These claims require proving that *other people* (the users) were directly infringing copyright with the AI, and that Anthropic was somehow responsible for that. The judge said the publishers didn't provide enough evidence. They only suggested users *might* use Claude to get lyrics, but didn't show it was actually happening on a wide scale. In fact, many of the examples they gave were from their own investigators, not real users.
- **Removing Copyright Info:** The publishers also claimed Anthropic intentionally stripped copyright management information (like who wrote the song) from the lyrics. The judge dismissed this because the publishers themselves admitted that Claude sometimes *does* provide attribution, which contradicts their claim.

The Bottom Line
For now, Anthropic has won these early rounds. The judge found the publishers' requests were too broad and their evidence too weak to justify immediate action. However, this isn't the end of the case. The judge is giving the publishers 30 days to file a new, more detailed complaint to try again. The core issue of whether training AI on copyrighted material is legal is still far from settled.

A coalition of artist representatives has published an open letter calling on the music community to reject AI music generator Suno.

A group of artist representatives has published an open letter urging the music industry to reject AI music generator Suno, calling it a “brazen smash and grab” platform that uses artists’ work without permission.

The letter, published on the Music Technology Policy blog, was signed by several high-profile figures including Ron Gubitz of the Music Artist Coalition, songwriter Helienne Lindvall, and Chris Castle of the Artist Rights Institute.

It argues that unauthorized generative AI platforms are different from past technological disruptions, claiming they “flood platforms with AI slop and dilute the royalty pools of legitimate artists”.

The letter comes as Suno faces copyright lawsuits from major music companies and rights organizations. The RIAA sued Suno and rival Udio in mid-2024 on behalf of the three major labels. While Udio has since settled with Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group, Suno remains in legal battles with UMG, Sony Music Entertainment, and European rights organizations.

The letter also addresses the industry debate over “walled gardens” in AI music. This follows Suno’s recent settlement with WMG, which allowed the AI company to retain more functionality than rival Udio’s restricted model. Under Udio’s approach—backed by UMG—users cannot download or distribute AI-generated music outside the platform.

According to recent data from Deezer, approximately 60,000 AI-generated tracks are uploaded daily to the streaming service, making up about 39% of all music delivered to the platform. Up to 85% of streams on AI-generated music in 2025 were fraudulent, compared to 8% across Deezer's entire catalog.

Despite the controversy, Suno has continued to grow, hiring former Merlin CEO Jeremy Sirota and former Spotify executive Sam Berger. In November, the company closed a $250 million funding round at a $2.45 billion valuation, with the Wall Street Journal reporting it has reached $200 million in annual revenue, primarily from subscriptions.

The pressure group Artists For An Ethical and Sustainable Internet have launched a campaign against one of the biggest AI platforms: Suno.

The group has published an open letter, an opening salvo in their Say No To Suno campaign. It warns against the ambitions of Suno and the implications of the platform, which at present is generating an eye-watering 7 million new AI tracks *a day*.

A large proportion of those are so-called 'slop'. Indeed, Deezer has reported that 85% of the AI-generated tracks on its service are fraudulent and emerge from major generative models such as Suno.

"Musicians are vital members of our communities, our culture, and our social fabric": Bandcamp has banned AI music

"The hijacking of the world's entire treasure-trove of music floods platforms with AI slop and dilutes the royalty pools of legitimate artists from whose music this slop is derived," the open letter states bluntly.

Comparing Suno to the thieves who broke into the Louvre last year disguised as construction workers and made off with $100 of jewelry, the letter says those "who are promoting this new business model are operating in broad daylight, too – minus the yellow safety vests.

"That is AI music company Suno, the brazen 'smash and grab' platform whose 'Make it Music' ad campaign suggests that the most personal and meaningful forms of music can now be fabricated by their unauthorised AI platform machinery trained on human artists' work."

They quote Suno Chief Music Officer, Paul Sinclair, who has claimed that his company's platform is about "empowerment" that enables "billions of fans to create and play with music." Sinclair has argued that the present copyright laws are "walled gardens" that deny people access.

Using his metaphor, they say: "Ask yourself: just why are most gardens surrounded by fences or walls? To keep out rabbits, deer, raccoons and wild pigs seeking a free lunch. We cultivate, nurture and protect our gardens precisely because that makes them much more productive over the long run."

Qobuz to Start Labeling AI-Generated Music

Qobuz, a music streaming service, has created a system to find songs made by artificial intelligence (AI) on its platform. The company will begin tagging these tracks to protect artists and

Other streaming services are doing similar things. Deezer, another French platform, already shows AI labels to its users. Deezer receives over 60,000 fully AI-generated tracks every day and plans to offer its detection tool to the rest of the music industry.

Here's what Qobuz is doing:

- **Finding AI music:** Their tool is scanning both new uploads and existing songs.
- **Tagging tracks:** Labels for AI-generated content will appear on the app in the coming months.
- **Removing fake content:** They will delete AI tracks uploaded fraudulently, especially those pretending to be real artists.
- **No payment:** These tracks will not count toward royalty payments.

Georges Fornay, Deputy CEO of Qobuz, said: "The hyperinflation of AI-generated content is creating distrust across the music industry. At Qobuz, music discovery should be guided by human passion, not by computer algorithms designed for high volume. The company believes AI should help, not replace, human judgment."
A recent study cited by Qobuz found that music creators could lose over $13 billion in five years due to AI-generated content.

'END STREAMING FRAUD'

The following was written by Victoria Oakley, Chief Executive Officer of the IFPI, the organization that represents the recording industry worldwide, and Mitch Glazier, CEO of the RIAA (The Recording Industry Association of America). Commenting on the recording industry's ongoing global efforts to combat streaming fraud and suggest what the music business could do to put an end to it.

Streaming fraud is a quiet threat.

It's often undetected, but it's happening now and at scale. It's siphoning vital revenues away from the artists, songwriters, record labels, music publishers and others who power the music economy.

The mechanics are simple. Every day, fraudsters exploit gaps in music platforms' protections and across the supply chain. These criminals upload tracks via distributors and deploy armies of 'bots' to create artificial 'plays' of those tracks to generate income.

Because streaming services pay rights holders from a finite pool of revenue, income is being diverted from legitimate creators who attracted users, subscriptions, and advertising to these platforms in the first place.

This is theft, plain and simple.

And with the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), the practice has been industrialized, enabling the mass creation of artificial content and artificial listening, and making large-scale fraud cheaper and faster to perpetrate – and harder for systems to detect.

So how can it be fixed?

It requires a toolbox with varied but proactive and evolving approaches, along with robust enforcement that addresses both the artificial content that is used for fraud and the fake listening. IFPI, representing the recorded music industry worldwide, has taken legal action against many organizations behind these manipulation services.

We've disrupted and shut down illegal sites in Germany, France, Brazil and Canada, and we work with governments and law enforcement to help investigate and prosecute these crimes.
But to stop fraud at scale, the organizations with the data and leverage to prevent this fraudulent activity – including streaming services, content aggregators, and distributors – must act together.

So, what needs to be done?

- **Implement Robust Identity Verification:** Distributors need to know who is providing content to their services and digital service providers (DSPs) need to verify that accounts are used by real humans who are genuinely engaging with music and not 'bots'. These kinds of requirements are used in a variety of industries, such as banking, and involve verifying the identity of clients, including a determination of the level of risk that they could engage in unlawful activity.
- **Vigorously Vet the Content:** Distributors must put in place measures to verify not only the identity of their clients, but the legitimacy of their content before it goes live. The authenticity of both the customer and the content should be regularly reviewed.
- **Leverage Ecosystem Data:** DSPs have the advantage of seeing across the entire ecosystem and they must leverage this bird's-eye view. This means using first-class measures to be more effective in detecting, shutting down and mitigating the impact of fake plays and suspicious playlists.
- **Cross-Industry Intelligence Sharing:** When a bad actor is identified by one platform or service, they shouldn't be able to simply move their "business" to another. Information in respect of known bad actors and their methods should be shared to prevent them from evading enforcement and repeating their behaviour. That means regularly updating measures to capture new fraudulent activity and actors based on shared learnings.

These actions amount to something simple and essential: streaming services and distributors working together to identify, disrupt, and shut out fraudsters who abuse the system.
This is essential as generative AI continues to grow and develop.

Record labels are working to meet these standards. And, if we collectively use existing tools to share intelligence and apply best practices, we can make streaming fraud genuinely difficult and expensive to pursue.

But it will happen only if the entire music community comes together and commits to meaningful, sustained action.

The Rick Spins Show News

A Huge Thank You & A Look Back at an Eventful Month on The Rick Spins Show

Wow, what a month it has been! Thanks to all you crazy, dedicated followers of *The Rick Spins Show*, we've been on an incredible ride. Let's take a moment to recap the highlights before we dive into what promises to be an even more spectacular March.



February 9th: A Spectacular Interview with Birdy Young

The month kicked off with a fantastic on-air interview featuring the talented Birdy Young from Hideaway Honey. This was just the beginning—stay tuned because we have many more interviews with ISSA Artists lined up for you!

February 16th: Artist Appreciation Night Giveaways

Our "Artist Appreciation Night" was a huge success. A big congratulations to our lucky winners:

- **Stephanie Villasuso:** ISSA T-Shirt
- **Dalton Jones:** ISSA Prize Box plus 50 Raffle Tickets for the 2026 ISSA Summit
- **Trenton Chandler:** A stunning Cigar Box Guitar from Stogie Joe's Cigar Box Guitars, valued at $400!



Trenton sleeping with his new love!



Proud owner of a Stogie Joe's Cigar Box Guitar

February 26th: A Major Milestone on TikTok

We are thrilled to announce that we surpassed 1,000 followers on our TikTok page! This is a monumental achievement because it means we have completed all the necessary tasks to finally take *The Rick Spins Show* live on the platform. So, strap yourselves in—we'll be going live on TikTok very soon!

And Last But Certainly Not Least…

Rick himself received his very own custom *Rick Spins Show* Cigar Box Guitar, hand crafted by the amazing team at Stogie Joe's Cigar Box Guitars. It's a beauty!





Looking Ahead: March Mania is Coming!

Get ready, because March is going to be even bigger. We'll be featuring more interviews with ISSA artists and winding down Season 4 of the Top 15 Show, which will lead us to our most epic Battle of The #1's yet! Oh, and yes—get your daubers ready because *Rick Spins Show Bingo* is making its grand return!

Don't Forget to Submit Your Songs!

- For The Rick Spins Show: **issaradio.rick@gmail.com**
- For the ISSA 24/7 Commercial-Free Radio Stream: ISSAradiosubmissions@gmail.com

Tune In!

The Rick Spins Show is live every Monday and Thursday starting at 8:00 pm Eastern on ISSA Radio.
Listen live here: https://issasongwriters.com/issa-radio/
Follow us on TikTok: https://www.tiktok.com/@issa.rick.spins
Here's to a fantastic March



Courtyard fun at the 2025 ISSA Summit, a great time to network, collaborate, relax make new friends, renew friendships with old friends and have fun!

Don't miss out on this great opportunity at this years's event!



Angela Marie Eidenmiller provides us with some sage advice on a monthly basis for our Tips From Our Members section. Besides the great article that she wrote for this month, Angela also provided us with this gem, that many of us can related to!

The Day Job Isn't the Problem. The Silence Is.

There's a quiet truth moving through the independent music community—one most artists feel but rarely say out loud. In November, I took a job at Amazon.

- Not because I stopped believing in music.
- Not because I failed.
- Not because I "gave up."

I did it because I understand something too many musicians are suffering through in silence:

You can love your art deeply and still need stability, structure, and room to breathe. Most musicians don't walk away from music because they stop caring. They walk away because the pressure never turns off—bills, algorithms, comparison, guilt, and the unspoken belief that "real" artists should be struggling harder.

The industry has done an incredible job romanticizing burnout. But here's the truth that needs daylight:

- A day job can be a strategy.
- A season.
- A tool.

Working nights didn't make me less creative, it made me clearer.
- I watched systems work—and break.
- I learned discipline that doesn't depend on inspiration.
- I earned income that didn't demand my art perform on command just to survive.

And this part matters:

- Your worth as an artist is not reduced because your art isn't your only income.
- A job is not a moral failure.
- It's not an identity downgrade.
- It's not something you need to apologize for.

Some of the strongest, most sustainable artists I know are the ones who stopped asking their music to rescue them financially before it was ready—and instead built stability around it. The "starving artist" myth benefits everyone except the artist.

- Sustainable artists last longer.
- They make clearer decisions.
- They protect their creativity instead of bleeding it dry.

So if you're clocking in somewhere and still writing songs late at night…
If you're working Amazon, retail, construction, teaching, bartending, ride share—while still chasing the thing that lights you up—
You are not behind. You are building a foundation!

Foundations don’t look glamorous.
- They look quiet.
- They look like discipline without applause.
- They look like leadership.

And leadership is exactly what the independent music community needs more of.

—

Angela Marie Eidenmiller
International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA)

REFRIGERATOR CHECKLIST: FOR MUSICIANS WITH DAY JOBS

(Print this. Stick it somewhere visible. Read it on the hard days.)

DAILY REMINDERS
□ My job funds my freedom—it doesn’t define my talent
□ Stability is not selling out
□ I don’t owe anyone a suffering narrative
□ Progress counts even when it’s quiet

CREATIVE PERMISSION
□ I am allowed to rest without guilt
□ I am allowed to create slowly
□ I am allowed to protect my art from burnout
□ I don’t need to monetize everything immediately

MINDSET CHECK
□ Comparison is not research
□ Algorithms are tools, not judges
□ My timeline is valid
□ Longevity beats virality

LEADERSHIP TRUTH
□ Artists with structure last longer
□ Income diversity is smart, not shameful
□ Discipline is a form of self-respect
□ I am building something that lasts

ON THE HARDEST DAYS
□ This is a season, not a sentence
□ I chose sustainability on purpose
□ I am not failing—I am preparing
□ Keep going

Beyond the Stream: How ISSA Members Can Build Their Own "Superfan" Platform

If you are a member of the International Singer Songwriters Association, you know that the heart of our business isn't just the song—it's the connection. We thrive on the intimate relationship between the storyteller and the listener.

Recently, Universal Music Group (UMG) made a major move that confirms what ISSA members have always known: **the future of music is direct.** UMG's multi-year agreement with the superfan platform EVEN (along with their investment in Stationhead) signals that the biggest players in the industry are pivoting hard toward direct-to-fan (D2C) engagement.

But here is the good news: You don't need a major label deal to use this strategy. In fact, as an independent singer-songwriter, you are *better positioned* to build authentic superfan relationships than a mainstream pop star. Here is how you can take UMG's superfan playbook and apply it to your own career.

What is the "Superfan Strategy"?

UMG Chairman Lucian Grainge identified superfan monetization as a key priority for 2026. The idea is simple: moving beyond the "spray and pray" model of streaming, where you try to reach millions of casual listeners. Instead, you focus on the **1,000 True Fans** who will buy anything you release, travel to your shows, and support you through thick and thin.

Platforms like EVEN give major artists tools to offer early access, exclusive content, and community features. As an independent artist, you can do this right now with the tools you already have.

How to Build Your EVEN (Without Waiting for a Deal)

1. Create a Tiered "Early Access" System
UMG artists will use EVEN to sell early access to music. You can do this immediately via platforms like Bandcamp (where fans can pay a premium for early releases) or your own website.

- **The ISSA Advantage:** Offer your loyal fans the chance to hear a new song before it hits streaming services. Record a simple voice memo explaining the story behind the lyric and send it exclusively to your email list. That raw, acoustic version is a product the streaming giants can't provide.

2. Leverage Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Merch
UMG is linking EVEN to its massive vinyl and merch infrastructure. You have something they don't: hyper-personalization.

- **The ISSA Advantage:** Since your audience is smaller, you can offer unique items. Think handwritten lyric sheets, custom chord charts, or a "Name in the Liner Notes" campaign for your next album. You don't need a warehouse full of vinyl; you need a few dozen exclusive, handmade items that your superfans will treasure.

3. Embrace "Community First" Platforms
UMG just bought a stake in Stationhead, a social listening app that lets artists interact with fans while listening to music.

- **The ISSA Advantage:** Host your own listening party. You can do this for free on Instagram Live or a Zoom call. Invite your top patrons (via Patreon) to a virtual listening session for your upcoming single. Talk about the writing process, the inspiration, and answer questions in real-time. This builds a bond that a playlist placement simply cannot buy.

The Takeaway

Universal is investing millions in technology to make their massive artists feel small and accessible again. They are trying to replicate the organic connection that singer-songwriters have with their audiences naturally.

As an ISSA member, you don't need a corporate deal to execute this strategy. You just need to be intentional. Focus less on chasing the fleeting attention of the algorithm and more on deepening the relationship with the fans you already have. Give them a reason to be invested in your journey, and they will become the foundation of a sustainable career.

The stage is set. The tools are available. Now, go engage your SUPERFANS!



ISSA Featured Artist of the Month

Congratulations to The Low Down Dirty Heathens for being the ISSA Featured Artist for March!

The Low Down Dirty Heathens formed in the backwoods dive bar and juke joints of North Carolina, The Low Down Dirty Heathens are genre-bending powerhouse blending Southern Rock,Swamp blues, and outlaw country. With roaring guitars,Thunderous drums, rumbling Bass,and lyrics that cut deep, the band channels the spirit of musical renegades like The Black Crowes, ZZ Top, and Lynyrd Skynyrd,all while forging a sound that's unmistakably their own.

If you haven't heard them yet, you should really check them out.

https://thelowdowndirtyheathens.com/

Tips From Our Members

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

Michael Botte's Just One Tip



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

This Month is all about claiming your **SPOTIFY FOR ARTIST ACCOUNT** where you can customize your Spotify page.

- Step 1: Go to the Spotify for Artists Website: **https://artists.spotify.com/claim** or artists.spotify.com.
  - Click on the "Get Access" button.
- Step 2: Select Your Account Type
  - Select "Artist or manager".
- Step 3: Log In to Your Spotify Account
  - Log in using your personal Spotify account credentials (email or username and password). You need to have at least a free Spotify account to use Spotify for Artists.
- Step 4: Find Your Artist Profile

After logging in, you should see a screen asking, "Which artist team is it?". You can find your artist profile by:

- Searching for your artist name: Type your artist name into the search bar.
  - Pasting your Spotify Artist URI: If you know your Spotify Artist URI, you can paste it directly into the search bar. You can often find this URI through your music distributor or using tools like DistroKid's Spotify URI Looker-Upper (**https://distrokid.com/uri/spotify/**).
  - Using your artist link: Some distributors provide an artist link (usually starting with **spotify.com/artist** or spotify:artist:) which you can also paste.
- Step 5: Claim Your Profile
  - Once you find your artist name in the dropdown list, click on it. Ensure that the profile information displayed is correct before proceeding.
  - Click "Continue" or "Next".
- Step 6: Verify Your Identity
  - Spotify will ask you to verify your identity. This often involves connecting one of your official social media accounts (like Instagram or Twitter) to your Spotify for Artists profile. Follow the on-screen instructions to do this.
  - In some cases, you might be asked for a business email address.
- Step 7: Submit Your Request
  - After completing the verification steps, click "Submit" or "Complete".
- Step 8: Wait for Confirmation



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 Independent Artists Can't Afford to Ignore TikTok Anymore!

Let's get this out of the way first.

If you're an independent musician who says, "TikTok isn't my thing," what you usually mean is:

- You don't want to dance
- You don't want to fake trends
- You don't want to feel silly
- You don't understand how it actually works

Good news — you don't need to do any of that.

TikTok isn't a dance app anymore - It's the largest music discovery engine on the planet, and for independent artists, it's the closest thing we've ever had to a level playing field.

TikTok Doesn't Care Who You Are — Only If People Care
Instagram and Facebook primarily show your content to people who already follow you.
TikTok shows your content to people who don't know you yet.
That single difference changes everything!

An artist with:

- Zero followers
- No label
- No manager
- No ad budget

…can still have a video seen by thousands — sometimes millions — if it connects.

TikTok's algorithm asks one question only:

- "Did this hold someone's attention?"

Not:

- How famous are you?
- How polished is your brand?
- How many followers do you have?

Independent artists excel here because authenticity beats polish every time.

A Real-World Example is the Independent Nashville Duo, Sons of Legion.

If you think meaningful growth takes years, Sons of Legion offer a reality check.
Without a major label or traditional industry machine, the Nashville-based duo leaned into TikTok using raw performance clips, storytelling, and personality-driven content.

The results were staggering:

- Their TikTok following jumped from ~8,000 to 300,000+ in about 30 days spilling over to all their other social media platforms!!
- As of Today, their social footprint includes ~500,000 TikTok followers, ~670,000 on Instagram, and ~1 million on Facebook
- A six-figure fanbase built organically — largely powered by raw, unedited short-form video content, real connection with real people.

This wasn't luck. This was discovery at scale. ***What most artists miss is that they didn't stop at Followers.***

Here's the move that changed everything.

Before releasing their first album, Sons of Legion gave away music in exchange for fans' email addresses funneling followers to their website.

- Not streams.
- Not follows.
- Real Ownership!

By the time the album officially dropped, they had:

- A large, engaged email list
- A primed audience waiting for release day
- Direct access to fans — no algorithm required

When the album was released, multiple songs charted immediately.

That's not hype. That's audience activation.

1. TikTok created discovery.
2. Email created control.

The combination created momentum!

What Independent Artists Actually Gain From TikTok

Let's be practical. This isn't about vanity metrics.

TikTok gives independent artists:

1. New Fans (Not Just Views)
   - People don't follow perfection. They follow connection. Song stories, lyrics that hit, honest moments, humor, heartbreak, joy — this is your advantage.
2. Proof of Demand
   - A song gaining traction on TikTok is data. It's proof that real humans respond to your music — something booking agents, radio, and industry partners actually care about.
3. Momentum Without Permission
   - You don't need approval. You don't need a budget. You don't need to be "ready."
   - You just need to show up!
4. Long-Tail Life for Your Songs
   - On TikTok, a video can take off weeks or months later. Your catalog keeps working even when you're not.

I hear you saying, “Ang… “but I Don’t Know What to Post…” You don’t need to be clever. You need to be clear. What works every day:
- “I wrote this song after…”
- “This lyric hurts more than I expected…”
- “If you’ve ever felt like _, this song is for you”
- Acoustic clips over studio perfection
- First drafts over final versions
- Talking to the camera, not performing at it

TikTok rewards storytelling, not marketing. The Biggest Myth: “TikTok Is Just for Young Artists”. Nope! TikTok is full of:
- Country artists
- Americana storytellers
- Folk musicians
- Rock and Blues artists
- Legacy acts finding new fans!

Music lovers live there. Period.

And many of them actively want to support independent artists once they feel connected.

TikTok Isn’t the Goal — It’s the Door! TikTok isn’t about going viral for ego.

It’s about:
- Driving people to your email list
- Filling rooms
- Selling merch
- Growing your community
- Owning your audience

TikTok is discovery. You decide where that discovery leads.

Final Thought (Read This Twice)

Independent artists don’t fail because their music isn’t good enough. They fail because not enough people ever hear it. TikTok gives you a microphone that reaches far beyond your local scene — without asking who you know or how much money you have.

You don’t have to love TikTok.
You just have to let it work for you.
And that might be the most independent move of all!

Congratulations, ISSA Member,

You’re receiving this valuable information for free because you belong to the only organization that supports independent artists everyday, all year — all career long!

- No paywalls.
- No gatekeeping.
- No “figure it out on your own.” Not just an awards show in August-
- Just real support, real education, and a global community that wants you to win everyday!

ISSA proudly supports your success

Your friend,

Angela

Keep creating. Keep connecting. Keep contributing.& Start Tik-Toking

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I traveled to the Colorado Rockies to visit our niece, a lifelong educator. During our time there, we got to talking about AI in the classroom. She mentioned that her school applies the Turing Test—a concept I wasn't familiar with. After she explained it, I became curious: could the same test be applied to AI in music? Here's what I came up with.

Todd

The Forge and the Algorithm: Can Machines Ever Replicate the Fire of Human Creativity?

Almost as soon as humans began shaping the world with their hands, they began shaping stories about something else that could shape the world: artificial life. In the very cradle of Western literature, Homer's *The Iliad*, we catch a glimpse of humanity's enduring fascination with synthetic intelligence. Homer describes the divine workshop of Hephaestus, the Olympian god of the forge, who labored alongside "servants made of gold." These weren't mere statues; they were automata, "possessing minds, hearts with intelligence, vocal chords, and strength," who had "learned to work from the immortal gods." For the ancient Greeks, the line between divine craft and machine was porous enough for gold to be animated with reason.

This myth, forged nearly three millennia ago, planted a seed that has grown into one of the defining questions of our time. We have journeyed from the mythical automata of Hephaestus to the very real, very powerful electronic computers of the 21st century. In the 1940s, as these machines hummed to life, the brilliant British mathematician Alan Turing proposed a way to measure their progress. He devised a simple, elegant challenge: the imitation game, now known as the Turing Test. If a computer could converse so naturally that a human judge couldn't tell it apart from another person, Turing suggested, we could reasonably say the machine was thinking.

For decades, the Turing Test stood as the ultimate benchmark. And today, large language models and sophisticated AI have passed it, or at least blurred the lines so profoundly that the test feels almost quaint. They can write poetry, diagnose diseases, and generate code with a fluency that would have seemed like pure science fiction just a generation ago.

But as Turing himself might have asked, have we truly crossed the threshold? Does an AI that can mimic human conversation possess the "mind and heart" of Hephaestus's golden helpers? Or is it merely the world's most sophisticated mirror, reflecting our own intelligence back at us without any internal light? This question becomes particularly poignant, and perhaps a little unsettling, when we consider the most human of domains: creativity.

Are machines on the verge of not just imitating, but actually achieving—and potentially replacing—human creativity?

This is not an abstract philosophical puzzle. We are already confronting it in our culture. AI tools can now generate stunning visual art, compose music in the style of Bach, and write narratives with compelling plots. The output is often indistinguishable from human-made work, and sometimes, it is undeniably beautiful.

Yet, we must return to Hephaestus's forge. The god was a laborer, a craftsman who poured his sweat and divine essence into his creations. His gold automatons were an extension of his will, his skill, and his purpose. Human creativity is similarly forged in lived experience. A blues song isn't just a sequence of notes; it's a distillation of sorrow, loss, and resilience. A painting isn't just an arrangement of color; it's a response to a sunset, a political upheaval, or a moment of quiet introspection. Our art is born from our bodies, our mortality, our loves, and our inevitable heartbreaks.

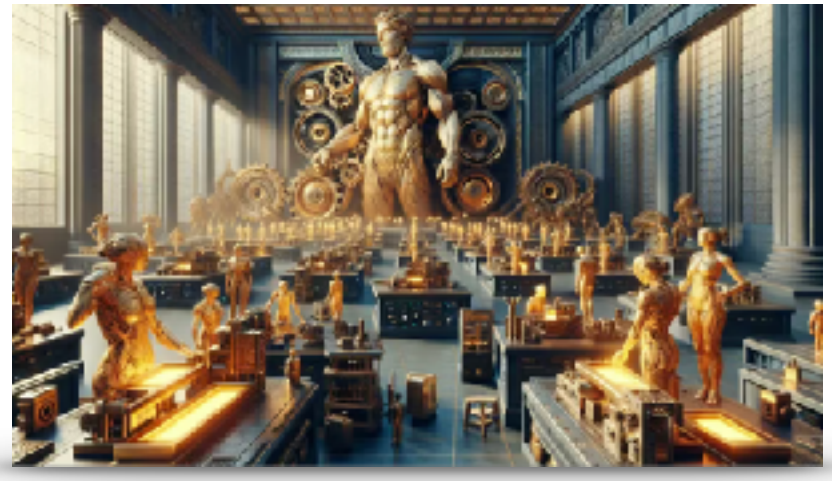
A machine learning model, for all its astonishing power, has no body to tire, no heart to break, no sun to feel on its skin. It does not create *because* it has something to say, but *because* it has been trained to predict what a human might want to hear. It is a virtuoso mimic, a master of imitation. It can analyze the structure of every Beethoven symphony ever written, but it cannot know the sublime agony of deafness, nor the defiant triumph of imposing silence onto sound.

The golden servants of Olympus were perfect helpers, but they were not Hephaestus. They could work the forge, but they could not conceive of what to forge. Similarly, today's AI can be an extraordinary collaborator, a tool of immense power. It can help a writer overcome a block, a musician experiment with new harmonies, or a painter visualize a concept. It can generate endless variations, acting as a digital muse.

But the animating spark—the initial idea, the emotional truth, the cultural commentary, the sheer, irrational desire to create something new that has never existed before—that still resides with us. It resides in the human who decides which of the AI's outputs has meaning, which one resonates with the messy, complicated experience of being alive.

Alan Turing's test asked if a machine could think. The more urgent question for our time is whether a machine can *feel*, and whether art created without feeling can ever truly move us. The automatons of Hephaestus were a marvel of divine craftsmanship, but they were still just tools. The miracle was the hand that held the hammer, the mind that envisioned the form.

As we stand at this new frontier, with algorithms humming in our own digital forges, our task is not to fear the new power we hold, but to wield it with the wisdom of a craftsman. We must ensure that the machine remains our tool, a golden servant that helps us build, but never the one who decides what is worth building. For that decision, the truly creative act, will always require a mind with a heart, forged not in silicon, but in the fire of human experience.



The Secret Behind the Summit (And How You Can Be Part of It)



Hello ISSA Family,

Every year, we get to witness something truly special: a professional, inspiring Summit for songwriters and artists—completely free for you to attend.

We do this because we believe in this community. We believe that education and connection should never have a price tag. It's a big promise to make, and every year, we find a way to deliver. But if you've ever wondered how a free event of this scale comes together, we'd love to pull back the curtain and share the "how" with you.

The Beautiful Complexity of "Free"

Putting on the ISSA Summit is a labor of love. It requires venues, technology, materials, and all the little details that make the experience magical. While your attendance is free, producing a professional-grade event comes with real-world costs.

Up to now, the incredible team behind the scenes has been covering those costs. And we'd do it forever if we could! But to ensure the Summit not only happens this year but grows for years to come, we have a choice to make: we can carry the weight alone, or we can build something even bigger, together.

The Ripple Effect of a Single "Yes"

This is where you come in—not as a donor, but as a collaborator. We aren't just looking for funding; we are looking for partners. And you have the power to bring those partners into our circle.

Think about the local businesses you love: the guitar shop where you bought your first acoustic, the recording studio with the perfect room sound, the merch company that prints your band's t-shirts.

When you connect us with a potential sponsor, you're doing two amazing things:

1. **You are strengthening the Summit.** Their support helps cover the costs that keep this event free for everyone.
2. **You are strengthening your own network.** You are introducing a business to hundreds of potential new customers. That business becomes a resource for our members, and that resource stays with you long after the Summit is over.

That raffle prize they donate? It could be your next piece of gear. That swag bag item? It could be your new favorite set of strings. It's a win-win that starts with a simple introduction.

Building the 2026 Experience, Together

We have the stage. We have the dates. Now, we want *you* to help us build the experience.

- **Help Us Find Our Speakers:** Is there a producer, a publisher, or a mentor whose brain you'd love to pick? Send us their name. Tell us what you want to learn.
- **Help Us Find Our Partners:** Do you know a business owner who might love to get their brand in front of a room full of passionate artists? Make the introduction. Every partnership, big or small, is a building block for the future.
- **Help Us Behind the Scenes:** Want to see how the magic is made? A simple "I'd love to help" to join the planning team is all it takes.

Let's Keep the Lights On, Together

The ISSA is your organization. It always has been. We built it to be a home for songwriters, and homes are strongest when everyone plays a part in keeping them warm.

We aren't worried about the future of the Summit, because we know this community. We know that when artists have a chance to help other artists, they step up. It isn't just a slogan for this group—it's how we sustain the music.

So, reply to this newsletter. Send us a name. Send us an idea. Send us an "I'm in."

Let's make the 2026 Summit the most collaborative, community-powered event yet. The stage is set, the spotlight is warm, and we can't wait to build it with you.

With gratitude and excitement,

The ISSA Summit Planning Team

Together, we don't just make music. We make sure it has a place to gather.

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.