

Billboard's 2018 R&B/Hip-Hop 100 Power Players Revealed

by [Billboard Staff](#)

September 27, 2018, 5:56pm EDT

Quality Control's Pierre "Pee" Thomas and Kevin "Coach K" Lee, the duo behind Migos and Lil Baby, lead Billboard's annual list of the top 100 executives and creatives who have made R&B and hip-hop the hottest genres on earth. To see how we chose this year's R&B/Hip-Hop Power Players list, scroll to the bottom of this page. See who made last year's inaugural Hip-Hop Power Players list here.

EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR

Dressed for work in a white T-shirt and black pants, Pierre "Pee" Thomas hunches over his cellphone in the bunker-like Atlanta headquarters of Quality Control Music. "We're into something real deep right now," he says as he scrolls through Apple Music's list of top 100 songs while Kevin "Coach K" Lee, fresh from the barber, reclines in his office chair.

Thomas is searching for a song on the list that doesn't qualify as hip-hop. He names two, Maroon 5's "Girls Like You" and Ella Mai's "Boo'd Up," but both feature rappers associated with the homegrown label they founded and run, Thomas as CEO and Lee as COO. "Girls Like You" guest stars Cardi B, whom the two say is the first client of a new consulting company they have formed, and a remix of "Boo'd Up" with a cameo by Quavo of Quality Control flagship act Migos helped propel Mai to the top of *Billboard's* Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart in July.

"How is hip-hop running the world right now?" asks a poker-faced Thomas, evoking a chuckle from Lee. They are fully aware that Quality Control and its major-label partner, Capitol Records, are on the front lines of that takeover.

[Read the full profile on Thomas and Lee here.](#)

CHANCE THE RAPPER, 25

Philanthropist; owner, Chicagoist

Good Deed: The 2017 best new artist Grammy Award winner personally donated \$1 million to Chicago Public Schools.

Budding Media Baron: Chance has promised that a new album is on the way, but during the last two years he has been busy investing in his native Chicago. In 2017, his SocialWorks charity raised another \$2.2 million for the arts and education programs at 20 schools. And in August, he announced, in the lyrics of new song “I Might Need Security,” that he had acquired local news site *Chicagoist*. In a statement, Chance said the site would be relaunched as “an independent media outlet focused on amplifying diverse voices and content,” but, just as he has done with his music, it won’t be a surprise if the media-savvy artist (whose parents have worked in city and state politics) uses his new acquisition to shine an editorial light on the public servants and corporations that aren’t doing right by the citizens of his hometown.

KENDRICK LAMAR, 31

Pulitzer Prize winner

Achievement Of The Year: In April, Lamar became the first non-classical or jazz musician to receive the Pulitzer Prize for his 2017 album, *DAMN*.

Ran With The Panther: Lamar has been unavoidable over the past year. His Pulitzer win vaulted him into a cultural pantheon occupied by Ornette Coleman, Toni Morrison and Ernest Hemingway. The award also crowned a spectacular 12 months during which the songs from *DAMN* collectively generated 3.3 billion on-demand streams, while streams for the tracks on *Black Panther: The Album*, the smash Marvel movie soundtrack he co-produced (and appeared on), totaled 1.3 billion.

[READ MORE](#)

Kendrick Lamar Accepts the Pulitzer Prize for 'DAMN.': 'It's an Honor'

RIHANNA, 30

Founder, Fenty Beauty By Rihanna

The Beauty Of Diversity: Unanimously praised for its staggering 40 shades of diversity-embracing foundation, Rihanna’s Fenty Beauty line challenged the cosmetics industry to start reconsidering its consumers while also proving artists no longer need to be the face of a brand when they can make bank by being the brand. Within a month of release, sales were valued at \$72 million and the line helped raise business partner LVMH’s cosmetic and perfume sales for the third quarter of 2017 by 17 percent.

Work, Work, Work, Work...: While disrupting the beauty industry, the Barbadian artist has continued expanding her well-reviewed clothing line with PUMA and her Savage x Fenty lingerie company, while reportedly working on two albums: one pop, the other dancehall.

MARLENY DOMINGUEZ-REYES, 40

Senior vp marketing, Republic Records

TYLER ARNOLD, 26

VP A&R, Republic Records

Made The Most Of The Post: Post Malone ranks as one of Republic's biggest success stories of the past year, and both Arnold (who is responsible for signing him in 2015) and Dominguez-Reyes played a key role in making the rapper ubiquitous on the charts. His second studio album, *beerbongs & bentleys*, generated three top five hits on the Billboard Hot 100, and two of them, "rockstar" and "Psycho," hit No. 1. Arnold helped bring Metro Boomin's Boominati Worldwide label to Republic in June 2017, while debut single "No Complaints" (featuring Drake and Offset) amassed 177 million streams.

Next!: Now that Post Malone is a hit, Dominguez-Reyes says she's wondering, "Where's the next Post? Not [another] exact version of him, but a new iteration."

[READ MORE](#)

Post Malone's 'Beerbongs & Bentleys' Nets Third Straight Week at No. 1 on Billboard 200

ETHIOPIA HABTEMARIAM*

President, Motown Records

Fab Three Ties Fab Four: The alliance between Motown and Quality Control Music continues to pay dividends. The three Migos notched their second consecutive Billboard 200 No. 1 with platinum LP *Culture II*, and scored Hot 100 top 10 hits with its singles "MotorSport," "Stir Fry" and "Walk It Talk It." Newcomer Lil Baby scored his first Hot 100 top 10, "Yes Indeed," with Drake.

Harvest Time: With a roster that includes joint ventures with producer Zaytoven and rapper Chaz French, Habtemariam says betting on people "who know how to do the hard work and build" frames her business strategy. "Streaming shined a light on what we already knew: the dominance of black music," she says. "Luckily, we had already planted the seeds -- developed relationships and signed talent."

IBRAHIM "IB" HAMAD, 34

Co-founder/president, Dreamville; manager, J. Cole

Fulfilled Dreamville: Hamad is the bedrock upon which J. Cole and Dreamville continue to flourish. Cole's 2018 *KOD* album was his fifth to top the Billboard 200, and on May 5, he became the first artist to debut three songs -- "ATM," "Kevin's Heart" and "KOD" -- in the top 10 of the Hot 100 in the same week. The label's success led its co-founders to partner with Live Nation-owned promoter ScoreMore Shows to plan a Dreamville Festival on Sept. 15 in Cole's hometown of Raleigh, N.C. Hamad says 20,000 tickets were sold before the lineup -- which included Cole, SZA and Young Thug -- was announced. Just four days before showtime, however, the fest had to be canceled due to Hurricane Florence. It has since been rescheduled for April 6, 2019.

Expansion Plan: Hamad plans to branch out into sports management in 2019. "It has always been a passion of mine," he says.

[READ MORE](#)

J. Cole Claims Fifth No. 1 Album on Billboard 200 Chart & Biggest Week of 2018 With 'KOD'

MICHAEL KYSER, 52

President of black music, Atlantic Records

JULIETTE JONES*

Executive vp urban radio promotion, Atlantic Records

DALLAS MARTIN, 34

Senior vp A&R, Atlantic Records

ORLANDO WHARTON, 35

VP urban A&R, Atlantic Records

Brought Cardi To The Party: The groundbreaking chart and sales success of Cardi B -- her album *Invasion of Privacy* debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200, has spent 21 weeks in the top 10 and generated 2.1 billion streams -- is one of several success stories that Atlantic's R&B/hip-hop team has written over the last 18 months: Bruno Mars, Tank and Gucci Mane have all added to Atlantic's 14.6 percent share of the genre; Martin A&R'd Nipsey Hussle's critically acclaimed 2018 album, *Victory Lap*; and Wharton put together Kodak Black's double-platinum "Roll in Peace" (featuring XXXTentacion) and platinum singles by A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie and PnB Rock.

R&B-Surgence: Kyser says Atlantic is focused on tapping into "the R&B renaissance that's happening" with "several baby acts [including Ayannis and Sebastian Mikael] that we're ready to break."

LEE L'HEUREUX*

Senior vp/head of rhythm, urban and hip-hop promotion and strategy, Warner Bros. Records

Achievements Of the Year: L'Heureux has been behind some of the biggest songs on the radio during the last year, including BlocBoy JB's "Look Alive" (featuring Drake), which spent two weeks atop *Billboard's* R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart in May, and Lil Pump's "Gucci Gang" -- nine weeks in the Hot 100's top 10. He worked closely with the late Mac Miller and is currently promoting the entire OVO roster.

Radio: As Important As Ever: Despite the role that streaming has played in hip-hop's pop dominance, L'Heureux says that every effective promotion campaign begins or ends with radio: "Find another place on the planet with the potential to reach 200 million people a week."

[READ MORE](#)

Lil Pump's 'Gucci Gang' Is Shortest Hot 100 Top 10 by Length in 42 Years

KEVIN LILES, 50

Co-founder/CEO, 300 Entertainment

RAYNA BASS, 31

Head of urban marketing, 300 Entertainment

SELIM BOUAB, 40

Senior vp A&R, 300 Entertainment

Giving 300 Percent: Under the guidance of Liles, a former DJ and Def Jam executive, 300's data-led approach drove Billboard 200 successes for Young Thug's *Super Slimey* mixtape with Future (No. 2), which has generated a collective 464 million streams, and Tee Grizzley's *Activated* (No. 6). Bouab's instinct for talent -- he signed Fetty Wap in 2014 -- and Bass' digital-savvy rollouts have broken songs for TK Kravitz ("Ocean") and Paper Lovee ("Here 4 Ya").

Genre Blending: Bass says 300's urban department is doing its part to expand the label's pop, rock and alt divisions, which led to New Zealand jazz-pop quartet Drax Project featuring on a track by rapper Famous Dex. "Everyone at 300 is [working] on the project to make it a success," she says.

MIKE WILL MADE-IT, 29

CEO, Ear Drummer Records and Ear Drummers Entertainment

"Humble" And Proud: Following the success of Rae Sremmurd's "Black Beatles," Mike WiLL raised the bar with *SR3MM*, an ambitious triple album -- which included solo LPs by brothers Slim Jxmmi and Swae Lee -- that has registered 484,000 equivalent album units and over 632 million streams. He also produced Kendrick Lamar's "HUMBLE.," which became the rapper's first Hot 100 No. 1 as a lead artist and picked up three Grammy Awards.

THE R&B REVIVALISTS:

MARK PITTS*

President of urban music, RCA Records; CEO, ByStorm Entertainment

TUNJI BALOGUN, 35

Executive vp A&R, RCA Records; co-founder, Keep Cool

CAROLYN WILLIAMS*

Executive vp marketing, RCA Records

Melanie Dunea

From left: Pitts, Williams and Balogun photographed on Aug. 29, 2018 at the New York headquarters of Sony Music Entertainment.

At a time when the majors have prioritized signing hip-hop talent to capitalize on the genre's popularity among streamers, this trio of RCA executives has led an R&B renaissance that is also being driven by digital consumers. Their development of artists such as SZA, H.E.R., Miguel, Normani and Khalid has produced a new generation of stars. And the signing of R&B/hip-hop hybrid Childish Gambino in January resulted in his first single for the label, "This Is America," hitting No. 1 on the Hot 100.

Ctrl, the debut album by 2017 breakout SZA, has generated 1.5 billion streams and earned 1.3 million equivalent album units since its release. Genre-bender Miguel rose to No. 3 on *Billboard*'s R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart with "Sky Walker" featuring Travis Scott. Fellow 2018 best new artist nominee Khalid followed a breakout year with several collaborations, including "Love Lies," a top 10 hit with new Keep Cool/RCA signee Normani. And H.E.R.'s EP, *I Used to Know Her: The Prelude*, rose to No. 1 on the Top R&B Albums list. Says Balogun: "H.E.R. is going to be around for decades."

The Change-Up: "R&B was replaced on the radio by hip-hop," says Balogun. "Its resurgence could be tied directly to streaming, because there are a lot of young women who are saying, 'Here, take my vibe for today.' I love Future, Drake and Lil Uzi Vert, but sometimes I want to vibe out to H.E.R., SZA or Jorja Smith."

All About The Music: "SZA is changing the game, straight up," says Williams. "And I'm so proud of H.E.R. and how she has been able to inspire [listeners] to focus on the music. It's not always about imaging and your social game."

The Magic Of Miguel: "When I found Miguel, I was told, 'He's talented, but he is not going to get played on the radio,'" recalls Pitts. "Our first studio session was with Usher. Miguel wore eyeliner. Before Usher arrived, I said, 'Yo, dog, what is that?' He starts to explain but then pauses and says, 'This is my shit -- why aren't you on it?' That's the moment I fell in love. I said, 'I know what you're trying to do. Let me help you.' I wanted him to keep his brand. If we're going to do it, we're going to do it our way."

SYLVIA RHONE*

President, Epic Records

TRACI ADAMS*

Executive vp promotions, Epic Records

Astroworld Blasts Off: Under Rhone’s leadership, Travis Scott’s *Astroworld* topped the Billboard 200 in August with one of the biggest debut weeks of 2018. All 17 of its tracks debuted simultaneously on the Hot 100, making Scott only the fifth artist to land that many songs on the chart at once. Adams was promoted in April after her team delivered a string of hits that included French Montana’s “Unforgettable.”

[READ MORE](#)

Travis Scott's 'Astroworld' Spends Second Week at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Albums Chart

GHAZI SHAMI, 42

Founder/CEO, EMPIRE

Universal Appeal: In April, the Bay Area independent inked a nonexclusive, multiyear distribution pact with Universal Music Group. “We’re working closely with [UMG’s labels] to develop a lot of their younger acts,” says Shami, whose ear for talent led him to release (with indie Bad Vibes Forever) XXXTentacion’s debut studio LP and to sign a new deal with the rapper shortly before his murder in June. “God rest his soul,” says Shami, who is readying a posthumous release of new recordings by X.

Empire Building: Shami plans to open a London outpost tailored to the U.K. grime scene and is “planting seeds” in Southeast Asia through a partnership with Sean Miyashiro’s collective, 88rising.

ANTHONY “TOP DAWG” TIFFITH, 48

Founder/CEO, Top Dawg Entertainment

DAVE FREE***TERRENCE "PUNCH" HENDERSON***

Co-presidents, Top Dawg Entertainment

All The Stars: Tiffith, who was *Billboard*’s 2017 Hip-Hop Power executive of the year, and his co-presidents maintained Top Dawg’s momentum with the platinum success of R&B revelation SZA’s four-time Grammy-nominated debut, *Ctrl*, while Kendrick Lamar won a Pulitzer Prize for his triple-platinum LP, *DAMN.*, and co-produced *Black Panther: The Album*, which has moved 1.3 million equivalent album units.

Peer Pressure: Every TDE release is put through the ringer in a group listening session that can get heated. “Our family structure is really crazy,” says Free. “Everybody in the company has a voice.”

[READ MORE](#)

Kendrick Lamar and Anthony 'Top Dawg' Tiffith on How They Built Hip-Hop's Greatest Indie Label

KANYE WEST, 41

CEO, G.O.O.D. Music

PUSHA T, 41

President, G.O.O.D. Music

High Five: In May and June, G.O.O.D. Music made waves with its rollout of five West-produced albums in as many weeks, including Pusha's *DAYTONA* (159 million streams) and West's *Ye* (538,000 equivalent album units). The creative flurry came during a time in which West drew criticism for provocative statements about slavery and his support of President Donald Trump. "Nothing is going to make us conform," says Pusha of the label's ambitious output and its iconoclastic CEO.

Ye's Back: "He spearheaded everything," says Pusha of West's return to the studio, which "started off as therapy. We were like, 'Let's go work on an album, man. We're just going to go knock this out.' That turned into, 'Wait, this would be good for [G.O.O.D. artist] Teyana [Taylor],' and 'I may want to put out an album.' It was hours of him finding interesting chops and loops. Watching him was phenomenal."

BRYAN "BIRDMAN" WILLIAMS, 49

RONALD "SLIM" WILLIAMS, 51

Co-CEOs, Cash Money Records

Hip-hop Mint: The Williams brothers' brand has lived up to its name over the past 18 months. Drake's record-shattering *Scorpion* album, which was jointly released by Cash Money, Young Money and Republic, became the first LP to rack up a collective 1 billion global streams in a week. Nicki Minaj's *Queen*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, has earned 675,000 equivalent album units, including 679 million on-demand audio streams. Meanwhile, Birdman's public apology to Lil Wayne for their past legal battles, which were settled earlier this year, helped pave the way for the release of the rapper's long anticipated *Tha Carter V*.

[READ MORE](#)

Lil Wayne Announces 'Tha Carter V' Album Release Date

DION "NO I.D." WILSON, 47

Executive vp, Capitol Music Group; President, Artium recordings

Five For 4:44: Wilson, who was the sole producer of Jay-Z's *4:44*, snagged five Grammy nominations, including producer of the year, nonclassical. He also produced four tracks on Drake's *Scorpion*: "Survival," "Nonstop," "Emotionless" and "Summer Games."

All Hail, The New Queen: Recruited to solidify Capitol Music Group's urban-market credibility, the respected R&B/hip-hop producer and A&R clairvoyant brought Vic Mensa to the label and points to points to Queen Naija, a vlogger and singer who topped *Billboard*'s Emerging Artists chart in July, as an example of what's to come. "We're [evolving] from a pop-leaning company to a very diverse, broad one," he says.

NICOLE WYSKOARKO, 40

Executive vp urban operations, Interscope Geffen A&M

TIM GLOVER, 34

MANNY SMITH, 38

Senior vp's A&R, Interscope Geffen A&M

DASH SHERROD, 31

VP A&R, Interscope Geffen A&M

The Breakthrough Bunch: Interscope's A&R department has delivered big wins with veterans and newcomers. New team leader Wyskoarko is behind the U.S. crossover of British songstress Ella Mai, whose "Boo'd Up" topped *Billboard*'s Adult R&B Airplay chart in July and has notched 523 million streams. Smith, who A&R'd Kendrick Lamar's *DAMN.*,

reunited with the rapper to curate the Billboard 200-topping *Black Panther* soundtrack; Glover oversaw A&R for J. Cole's fifth consecutive No. 1 LP, *KOD*; and Sherrod was instrumental in the signing of "emo rap" star Juice WRLD, whose debut album, *Goodbye & Good Riddance*, has amassed 1 billion streams.

Keeping It 100: Given the recent talent surge, Wyskoarko says she is focused on keeping the label's roster streamlined to ensure that it has "the bandwidth to service all of those projects."

[READ MORE](#)

Juice WRLD Scores First Top 10 on Billboard Hot 100 With 'Lucid Dreams'

DOONEY BATTLE, 29

Co-founder/CEO, Tha Lights Global

Big Deal: In early August, Battle inked a partnership with Sony Music that will steer Tha Lights Global's talent to the label group. Sources say the five-year deal is worth upwards of \$20 million.

Not Mailing It In: Battle signed Lil Pump in 2016, when the SoundCloud rapper was just 16. That foresight paid off with Pump's breakthrough hit, "Gucci Gang," which shot to No. 3 on the Hot 100 in December and has amassed over 798 million YouTube views. "Two years ago, I knew no one in the industry," says Battle, who was then delivering mail in southern Florida. "But my goal was to get to the top, and it essentially happened."

SHAWN "JAY-Z" CARTER, 48

Founder, ROC NATION

JAY BROWN, 44

CEO, ROC NATION

DESIREE PEREZ, 48

COO, ROC NATION

The Carters Clean Up: Jay-Z and Beyoncé's long-awaited joint album, *Everything Is Love*, has earned 408,000 equivalent album units since its surprise release in June. Meanwhile, their *On the Run II* Tour has grossed over \$213.4 million worldwide and, *Billboard* estimates, is trending toward the \$250 million mark.

Can't Knock The Hustle: Now in its 11th year, Roc Nation has evolved into a diversified company with tentacles that stretch well beyond music, including TV production, a film division that has produced documentaries on Trayvon Martin and Kalief Browder, and sports management. But that isn't to say the Roc has been slacking musically. It has a piece of J. Cole's *KOD*, which had one of the strongest album debuts of 2018; and DJ Khaled's "No Brainer" became the third top five Hot 100 hit of his career.

[READ MORE](#)

Beyonce & JAY-Z's 'Everything Is Love' Launches at No. 1 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Chart

SEAN "PUFF DADDY" COMBS, 48

Chairman, Combs Enterprises; CEO, Bad Boy Entertainment

DIA SIMMS, 42

President, Combs Enterprises

Brand(y) Expansion: Simms, a Queens native who grew up watching Salt-N-Pepa dance rehearsals, helped oversee the June launch of the latest offering from Combs Wine & Spirits: Cîroc VS Brandy, which has been endorsed by Cassie, Rick Ross and DJ Khaled. And Combs (whose Bad Boy roster includes Machine Gun Kelly, French Montana, Cassie, Christian “King” Combs and Janelle Monáe) returned to TV as a producer and judge on the second season of Fox’s singing competition *The Four: Battle for Stardom*, which averaged 2.7 million viewers.

Above All, Revolt: “The short-term priority right now is REVOLT Television, which is a home for unapologetic hip-hop music, fashion, culture and swagger,” says Simms. “It’s authentic and one of the few truly majority-black-owned TV networks in the world.”

DR. DRE, 53

Founder/CEO Aftermath Entertainment and Beats by Dr. Dre

Kamikaze Pilot: Dre is practically a recluse in today’s social-media-friendly world, but he still moves the needle. He executive-produced Eminem’s *Kamikaze*, which, in the week following its surprise release on Aug. 31, earned 434,000 equivalent album units. (He’s also featured on the track “Bad Guy” and in the video, along with footage of The Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur.) *Kamikaze* is one of four LPs on Dre’s Aftermath label that topped the Billboard 200, along with Eminem’s *Revival*, Kendrick Lamar’s Pulitzer-winning *DAMN.* and his *Black Panther* soundtrack. Meanwhile, Apple and Beats are, respectively, Nos. 1 and 2 in the U.S. headphone market, according to research firm NPD Group.

Legacy Secured: HBO’s 2017 miniseries *The Defiant Ones* showcased Dre’s history as one of hip-hop’s most influential architects.

[READ MORE](#)

Eminem's Projected 'Kamikaze' Debut Shows What a Surprise Release Can Still Do For a Veteran Artist

AUBREY “DRAKE” GRAHAM, 31

Co-founder, OVO and OVO Sound

NOAH “40” SHEBIB, 35

Co-founder, OVO and OVO Sound; producer

MR. MORGAN*

President, OVO Sound

Scorpion Slays All: Drake and his OVO team owned the summer of 2018 with Drizzy’s record-setting album *Scorpion*. Prodigious beatmaker and longtime collaborator 40 produced the bulk of the LP, which became the first ever to amass 1 billion global streams in a week. Drake also topped The Beatles’ record for the most simultaneous hits in the Hot 100’s top 10 -- seven to The Fab Four’s five.

OVO’s Plan: The Toronto-based OVO Sound label, which was co-founded by Oliver El-Khatib, expanded its distribution pact with Warner Bros. Records and installed Mr. Morgan at the major’s New York offices. Meanwhile, Drake’s manager, Adel “Future the Prince” Nur, is quarterbacking the rapper-actor’s expansion into film and TV.

SHAWN HOLIDAY, 41

Head of urban music, Columbia Records and Sony/ATV Music Publishing

Stargazing With Scott: Holiday, who calls himself “music’s casting director,” found a genuine star for Sony/ATV when he signed Travis Scott, whose *Astroworld* became his second Billboard 200-topping album, generating over 1.3 billion streams. He also helped finalize Sony’s partnership with Tha Lights Global, the company that manages Lil Pump, whom he teamed with Diplo and French Montana on “Welcome to the Party,” featuring Zhavia Ward.

Mentor Mindset: Holiday says that he wants to “empower and mentor more young executives. I see too many coming into the game for the wrong reasons,” he adds. “They come in for a quick check and think they’ve made it.”

[READ MORE](#)

Diplo, French Montana, Lil Pump & Zhavia Team Up For Deadpool 2 Track: Listen

PAUL ROSENBERG, 47

Chairman/CEO, Def Jam Recordings; co-founder/president, Shady Records; CEO, Goliath Artists

Brand-New Jam: Since succeeding Steve Bartels in January, Rosenberg has focused on building out Def Jam’s executive roster. His hires include executive vp/GM Rich Isaacson and executive vp A&R Steven Victor. In Rosenberg’s brief time there, Def Jam has already landed seven top 10 albums on the Billboard 200, including No. 1s from Kanye West and Logic.

Shady Business: Rosenberg’s Def Jam work hasn’t gotten in the way of his management of Eminem. He was involved in every step of the rapper’s *Kamikaze*, right down to the surprise drop in August that landed 11 songs on the Hot 100.

CARON VEAZEY*

Co-founding partner, I Am Other Entertainment

Managing a Multitasker: Veazey kept the creative collective she co-founded with Pharrell Williams, whom she also manages, humming while he wrote and produced for Migos, Ariana Grande, Beyoncé and Jay-Z, and launched a tour with N*E*R*D behind the trio’s first single in seven years, “Lemon,” which went platinum. And Williams’ vibrantly colored campaign for Adidas’ tennis collection won gold and silver honors at the Cannes Lion Awards in June.

How To Succeed In Music: With the rise of streaming, Veazey says that A&R is the key to industry momentum. “There’s so much out there in terms of music,” says the bicoastal executive. “A&R becomes super important to cutting through and finding the gems.”

STEVEN VICTOR, 38

Executive vp/head of A&R, Def Jam Recordings; founder/CEO, Victor Victor Worldwide

Big Promotion: Less than a year after he became senior vp A&R at Universal Music Group, New York-based Victor was tapped last October to run Def Jam’s A&R department. His team has since signed 10 acts, including producer Ronny J and, in partnership with Pharrell Williams’ Star Trak imprint, YK Osiris.

Going The Distance: “I don’t think artist development is a lost art,” says Victor. “I don’t want to sign someone who’s going to be hot today but over within six months.”

W. CORTEZ BRYANT, 39

COO, Young Money Entertainment; Co-CEO, The Blueprint Group; partner, Maverick

Wayne's Win: Bryant says the “most rewarding victory” of the past year was the settlement of client Lil Wayne’s legal dispute with his label, Cash Money Records -- and, ultimately, a public apology from co-CEO Bryan “Birdman” Williams. The treaty freed up Weezy’s long-delayed *Tha Carter V* for release.

The Queen And The Kid: Bryant’s superstar client Nicki Minaj has been making news with her latest album, *Queen*, and her Beats 1 radio show, while upstart Rich the Kid’s debut LP, *The World Is Yours*, bowed at No. 2 on the Billboard 200.

[READ MORE](#)

Rich The Kid Cashes In With No. 2 Debut on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Chart

PAT CORCORAN, 28

Manager, Chance The Rapper; founder, Haight Brand

Chance The Multihyphenate: With Corcoran’s guidance, Chance the Rapper blossomed into a multimedia entertainer, hosting *Saturday Night Live* last November, co-starring in the campy horror film *Slice* and landing a voice role in DreamWorks Animation’s 2020 *Trolls* sequel. Meanwhile, the rapper’s features on DJ Khaled’s “No Brainer,” with Justin Bieber and Quavo, and on Cardi B’s “Best Life” respectively hit Nos. 5 and 39 on the Hot 100.

New Hustles: Corcoran added pop upstart Clairo to his roster and launched No Fine Print wine with Skrillex manager Tim Smith.

BEYONCÉ KNOWLES, 37

CEO, Parkwood Entertainment

STEVE PAMON, 48

COO, Parkwood Entertainment

Secret Beygent: Pamon, a former JP Morgan Chase executive, flies below the radar as management and operations muscle at Beyoncé’s corporate arm, and the year’s primary flex has been showing off the renewed strength of Bey and Jay-Z’s business and personal partnership. The power couple’s surprise LP *Everything Is Love*, a Parkwood/Roc Nation collaboration, spun off five Hot 100-charting singles; a viral music video filmed in the Louvre for “Apes**t” racked up 119 million-plus views on Bey’s YouTube channel. Meanwhile, the couple’s *On the Run II* Tour has grossed \$213.4 million and counting.

DRE LONDON*

Founder, London Entertainment

Dream Come True: “My dream was to have a No. 1 artist in music,” says London-born Andre Jackson, who was christened Dre London by French Montana. In 2018, his marquee act, Post Malone, fulfilled that dream when his second LP, *beerbongs & bentleys*, spent its first five weeks at No. 1 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart -- the first time a male act had done so since 2002.

Post Production: With Post Malone’s music catalog surpassing 5.5 billion total streams in 2018, London is looking for new frontiers for the artist and says he will soon be launching a film/TV production company, Dre Vision, for that purpose. “Victory loves preparation,” says London.

[READ MORE](#)

Post Malone's 'Beerbongs & Bentleys' Nets Third Straight Week at No. 1 on Billboard 200

GEE ROBERSON*

CO-CEO, The Blueprint Group; partner, Maverick

Coronated Queen: Roberson worked with longtime client Nicki Minaj on the release strategy for her fourth album, *Queen*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 in August.

Bespoke Branding: In May 2017, the Bronx native secured a partnership with Stillhouse Whiskey for G-Eazy, whom he co-manages with The Revels Group's Jamil Davis and Matt Bauerschmidt. "It's about finding a tailored suit for a particular act," says Roberson.

ANTHONY SALEH, 32

CEO, Emagen Entertainment Group; founding partner, wndrco

Nasir Is Here: Saleh cites "finally getting a Nas album out" -- *Nasir*, his first in six years -- as the high point of the past 12 months.

Making The Right Call: At 15, Saleh worked as a magazine telemarketer. Now, more than a decade later, the California native has mastered managing a roster that includes frequent chart-topper Future as well as rising artist/summer festival favorite Alina Baraz. "I work with artists who have very clear visions for themselves," says Saleh. "I am then able to do what I do best, which is help bring that vision to life."

WASSIM "SAL" SLAIBY, 38

CEO, Sal & Co./XO Records; partner, Maverick

Achievement Of The Year: In April, Slaiby's star client The Weeknd notched his third consecutive Billboard 200 No. 1 with surprise EP *My Dear Melancholy*, then fulfilled his dream of headlining Coachella. "Seeing Abel [Tesfaye, aka The Weeknd] take over that stage and knowing how much it meant to him was very special," says Slaiby, who has worked with the artist since 2012.

Good Medicine: The Lebanese entrepreneur also manages French Montana, and the two partnered with Global Citizen and Mama Hope to build a Ugandan hospital that opened in March.

[READ MORE](#)

French Montana Launches Global Healthcare Initiative, Donates \$100K to Mama Hope Organization in Uganda: Exclusive

MARK CHEATHAM*

ZACH ISER, 33

CAROLINE YIM, 39

Agents, Creative Artists Agency

Cardi B Made The A-List: With 10-year CAA vet Cheatham in her corner, Cardi B made history as the first solo female rapper with two Hot 100 No. 1s: "Bodak Yellow (Money Moves)" and "I Like It" with Bad Bunny and J Balvin. Yim and Iser departed ICM for CAA in March, bringing with them a roster that includes SZA, Kehlani and Daniel Caesar.

Stage Mother: After a show-stopping Coachella debut followed by time off for the birth of her daughter, Kulture, Cardi is plotting a 2019 headline tour. Meanwhile, according to Yim and Iser, 2018 breakout Ella Mai sold out 15 shows on her summer tour.

ROBERT GIBBS*

Partner/music agent, ICM Partners

J. Cole-Powered: “When you look at the entire landscape of music, there’s only a handful of hip-hop arena acts,” says Gibbs, and his longtime client J. Cole is one of them. Gibbs booked 35 arena shows behind the release of the rapper’s *KOD* album, which *Billboard* estimates could gross \$45 million to \$50 million.

High on H.E.R.: Gibbs predicts big things for 21-year-old multi-instrumentalist H.E.R. (given name: Gabi Wilson). “She’s in the R&B space, but you’ll hear some hip-hop from her. I truly believe she could be this generation’s Prince.”

ERIN LARSEN, 32

Agent, Paradigm Talent Agency

Growth Agent: It has been a good year for Larsen’s clients Playboi Carti -- whose *Die Lit* album reached No. 3 on the Billboard 200 in May -- and Lil Uzi Vert, who topped the Billboard 200 with debut LP *Luv Is Rage 2* in September 2017.

Feelings Mutual: “It’s incredible to be a part of any defining moment of an artist’s career,” says Larsen, who cites the emotional jolts of “Uzi selling out [the 10,200-seat] Liacouras Center in North Philadelphia in December 2017 -- the neighborhood where he grew up and where [a lot of people] don’t ever make it out -- then playing for the largest crowd of his career at Lollapalooza” in August.

CARA LEWIS*

Founder/CEO, Cara Lewis Group

Put Astroworld Tour on the Launch Pad: Lewis, who in February became the first woman to win Pollstar’s Bobby Brooks Award for Booking Agent of the Year, cites Travis Scott’s 29-city Astroworld headliner tour -- which, she says, is sold out -- as one of the highlights of a very busy and fruitful last 18 months. After a 16-year hiatus, she also brought back her Smokin’ Grooves Fest with a lineup that included Erykah Badu, The Roots, Anderson .Paak and H.E.R. She says the Long Beach, Calif., fest sold all 15,000 tickets in a day.

Spotlight on Shady: After a four-year break, Lewis put longtime client Eminem on tour this spring behind the late-2017 release of his *Revival* LP. Could that roadwork have something to do with strong sales and streaming numbers for the rapper’s surprise August release, *Kamikaze*? (It earned 434,000 equivalent album units in its first week out.) “It may have acted as a catalyst for a younger demographic to consume more of his music,” says Lewis, “but *Kamikaze*’s success is the culmination of the project’s inherent quality and Eminem’s loyal fan base.” Lewis says that, “At present, there are no touring plans in 2019” for Slim Shady.

CHERYL PAGLIERANI*

Agent, United Talent Agency

Routing ‘Rockstar’: Paglierani booked and routed one of the summer’s biggest breakthrough tours: “rockstar” collaborators Post Malone and 21 Savage’s North American run of large amphitheaters. All 30 dates -- totaling nearly 350,000 tickets -- sold out, she says.

Prefiguring Post: The University of New Haven (Conn.) alumna made an early bet on Post Malone, adding him to her roster in 2015 because, she says, “he didn’t look or sound like anyone else.”

BRENT SMITH*

Partner/music agent, WME

Hip-Hop’s Hottest: Smith’s roster reads like a roll call of the genre’s biggest trendsetters of the last three years: Drake, who has landed 187 songs on the Hot 100 over the course of his

career (the most of any solo artist in the chart's history); Kendrick Lamar, who won the Pulitzer Prize and co-produced the soundtrack to the No. 1 U.S. movie of 2018, *Black Panther*; and Childish Gambino, whose video for "This Is America" has notched over 397 million views on YouTube.

Dealing With Drake: Smith adheres to a simple philosophy when it comes to working with Drizzy: "Follow his lead."

TARIQ CHERIF, 28

MATT ZINGLER, 30

Co-founders, Rolling Loud

Rolling Strong: The fourth year for the Rolling Loud festival was its biggest yet, attracting a crowd of 135,000 fans who paid \$300-plus to Miami in May to see J. Cole, Future, Migos and Post Malone. "This year, it felt like everything finally clicked," says Cherif, who met co-founder Zingler when they were elementary students in Hollywood, Fla.

Going Louder Overseas: "The meat of our lineup is what makes the difference between [selling] 30,000 and 60,000 tickets," says Cherif. "We try to ensure that every type of hip-hop fan will enjoy at least 10 artists on the bill." That philosophy enabled Rolling Loud to expand to Southern California in 2017 and the Oakland (Calif.) Coliseum this year, with plans to take the festival to Japan, China and the United Kingdom. As Zingler puts it, "We are planning to take over the world."

SHAWN GEE, 47

President, Live Nation Urban; partner, Maverick

Priority No. 1: Since he was tapped to lead the newly launched Live Nation Urban in May 2017, Gee has grown the live-music market for R&B, hip-hop and gospel one festival at a time.

Growing Broccoli: Gee moved Washington, D.C.'s Broccoli City festival to RFK Stadium in 2018, which, he says, resulted in 32,000 tickets sold, up from 8,000 in 2017. He also launched RapCaviar Live with Spotify; Exodus Music & Arts Festival in Irving, Texas, with gospel legend Kirk Franklin; and closed the first live-music deal with Prince's estate for 4U, a symphonic celebration of the late icon that is slated to play 47 dates stateside and in Europe, including London's Royal Albert Hall.

TYLER, THE CREATOR, 27

Founder, Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival

Flog Gnaw Flourishing: Tyler Gregory Okonma, aka Tyler, The Creator, has proved there's room in the live market for a lovingly curated, highly creative music/culture festival that doubles as a showcase for his friends and fashion line. Camp Flog Gnaw, set for Nov. 10-11 in Los Angeles, has outgrown its original setting, the 15,000-capacity Exposition Park, and moved to Dodger Stadium, which accommodates 56,000.

Amp'd Camp: SZA, Earl Sweatshirt and Jaden Smith are among the BFFs who will perform (no word if Timothée Chalamet, who's name-checked in Tyler's "Okra," will show). Concertgoers will also be able to shop the rapper's Golf Wang clothing line.

JENNIFER DRAKE, 36

Senior director A&R, Sony/ATV Music Publishing

IAN HOLDER, 37

Vp creative, Sony/ATV

Inked Cardi B: Drake managed to best a scrum of publishers vying for Cardi B by inking the rapper to a worldwide contract last October, ahead of the release of her debut album, *Invasion of Privacy*, and six total platinum certifications for 2018. Holder re-upped Pusha T and A\$AP Ferg while signing Lil Skies, Sabrina Claudio and Ronny J to their first deals.

Social Cachet: “My girlfriends and I watched [Cardi’s] Instagram feed like it was TV,” says the Los Angeles-based Drake, who made her pitch to the “Bodak Yellow” rapper after flying to Atlanta to see her perform. “I chased her!” she says with a laugh. “And Sony put together a great deal. Creativity and drive means nothing without team support.”

WALTER JONES, 37

Vp creative, Universal Music Publishing Group

STERLING SIMMS, 36

Director of creative, Universal Music Publishing Group

Corralled Cubeatz: Jones signed German producer duo (and twins) Cubeatz, which has crafted platinum hits for Drake, Travis Scott, Meek Mill, ScHoolboy Q and Kodak Black, among others, and inked Quay Global, whose production on Lil Baby’s “My Dawg” helped land the rapper a deal at Quality Control. Simms assisted Charlie Handsome, who produced Khalid and Normani’s “Love Lies,” in getting his first country placement as a songwriter-producer on Sam Hunt’s “Downtown’s Dead.” He also signed Ant Clemons, who is attracting attention for his “All Mine” cameo on Kanye West’s *Ye*.

Tomorrow, The World: “You have to be able to offer [talent] something your competitor can’t,” says Jones, adding that, with 44 international offices, UMPG offers global clout that’s increasingly important, given that “borders are moving and genres are crossing.”

RYAN PRESS, 38

Co-head of A&R, Warner/Chappell Music

‘Nice’ Moves For Drake: Press helped Drake own the summer when he paired sought-after producer Murda Beatz with the superstar on “Nice for What,” which spent eight weeks at No. 1 on the Hot 100 helped by an all-star video that included cameos by Tiffany Haddish and Issa Rae. Press’ go-to female producer duo, NOVA Wav, contributed to The Carters’ *Everything Is Love*.

On Deck: The Philadelphia native says he’s busy signing “the next generation of superstar writers and producers,” namely, Tay Keith, Elliott Trent and Pi’erre Bourne. When it comes to keeping his roster happy, he says, “Communication and trust is everything.”

JEFF VAUGHN, 33

Vp A&R, Artist Partner Group/Artist Publishing Group

Bona Fides: Three artists that Vaughn signed -- YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Kehlani and Lil Skies -- have collectively amassed 21 gold- and platinum-certified tracks and albums over the past 18 months.

Passion Project: “I try to listen to everybody,” says the former United Talent Agency assistant, who started working at 13 so he could buy Cash Money Records CDs. “Growing up in Northern Virginia wasn’t exactly a hotbed of hip-hop or opportunity, so I had to work really hard to stay in the mix,” says Vaughn. “It was a hobby that became a passion that became a job.”

TUMA BASA*

Director of urban music, YouTube

Major Move: After Basa turned Spotify’s RapCaviar playlist into a platinum brand that drove subscriptions; broke Lil Uzi Vert and Desiigner, among other artists; and, in

partnership with Live Nation, spawned a concert series, YouTube hired him away in March to work his magic on the video-first platform.

Thinking Of A Master Plan: Basa, who was a programmer for BET and REVOLT prior to Spotify, says he will focus on nurturing new talent “that’s not necessarily on everyone else’s radar,” adding, “I’m a curator by trade, and there’s a lot of dope hip-hop brands that have a presence on YouTube. I’d love to see a lot of those come up.”

CARL CHERY, 39

Creative director/head of urban, Spotify

From Apple To Caviar: After three years as head of iTunes and Apple Music’s R&B/hip-hop programming, Chery left to join the “monster across the street,” where he has kept the streaming platform’s RapCaviar brand growing: The playlist has surpassed 10.3 million followers.

Analytics And Instinct: Chery plans to build the Spotify brand through experiences outside of the app itself and won’t rely strictly on numbers to do so. “Curation should be a reflection of what’s happening in music and culture, but if you lean one way,” he says, referring to a pure analytics approach, “you might be blind to what’s happening [elsewhere].”

WAYNE HAMPTON*

Co-founder/Chief business development officer, Create Music Group

Breakthrough Of The Year: Hampton’s company, which started in 2015 as a YouTube royalties collection specialist, has expanded its artist services to include mixtape monetization, video content creation, music publishing and promotion through Flighthouse, the musical.ly (now TikTok) and YouTube channel that it acquired in 2017 for just \$50,000. Flighthouse’s teen followers have since grown from 1 million to 17.8 million and CMG’s revenue has jumped from \$16 million to \$30 million.

This One’s Personal: CMG has collected millions of dollars for Migos, Lil Yachty and Young Thug, but Hampton is particularly proud of discovering 25-year-old rapper Famous Dex and developing him into a multiplatinum multimillionaire. “I took a more hands-on approach because he’s from Chicago,” says Hampton, a Windy City native.

LARRY JACKSON*

Head of Content, Apple Music

Artist Ambassador: “All roads in hip-hop lead to Apple,” says Jackson, who has played an essential role in making its streaming service -- with over 50 million users -- a destination for fans of the genre. Apple Music amassed approximately 170 million streams of Drake’s *Scorpion* in 24 hours.

Trendsetters: Jackson has worked closely with the Beats 1 team on Drake, Travis Scott and Nicki Minaj’s respective shows *OVO Sound*, *.wav radio* and *Queen Radio*, which regularly become trending topics when they’re live. He has also shepherded acclaimed documentaries on the exploits of Sean Combs (*Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A Bad Boy Story*) and Bryan “Birdman” Williams (*Before Anythang: The Cash Money Story*).

THE DISCOVERY SPECIALIST:

ERIKA MONTES, 41

Head of artist and label services, West Coast, SoundCloud

Brad Ogbonna

Montes (top) and Bennett photographed on Aug. 17, 2018 at SoundCloud in New York.

Since joining SoundCloud and relocating to Los Angeles 20 months ago, Montes has been a pivotal force behind the online streaming platform’s first-ever artist-centric advertising

campaign, First On SoundCloud. Montes, who grew up in Miami and Ecuador, handpicked a first round of unsigned artists that included Galimatias, Jay Prince, Lorine Chia and Taylor Bennett, working with them to create 90-second video montages that gave them maximum exposure and helped monetize their music. Bennett, who is Chance the Rapper's younger brother, has certainly benefited from the campaign: He has generated 46.5 million career streams. "This next year I'd love to bring up-and-coming artists and their fans out in different cities," says Montes, "and have them vibe with each other -- to get to know who these fans really are."

More Than a Rap Platform: "I know that we are known for rappers, and I love them," says Montes, but in formulating the First On SoundCloud campaign, "I want to make sure we are inclusive of all genres."

Chi-Town Love: "Taylor Bennett was the first artist on my list, because Chicago has always played such a big part in my career. Island Def Jam was my first U.S. label job. I was a coordinator doing video promotions and got to work on Kanye West's first three albums back in 2004. I just fell in love with the city and its music," explains Montes, adding that she was pleased to "see that it's thriving, and knowing that I can bring shine to that."

Bennett On 'SoundCloud Rap': "The term was made into a genre and mocked, but what's overlooked is how the 'genre' addresses the world's lack of understanding and inclusiveness. I love Erika and SoundCloud because they have done a great job of understanding that narrative and allowing young men and women that look like me, and come from environments similar to mine, to be heard worldwide."

KEN JOHNSON*

Vp urban formats, Cumulus Media; program director, WNBW New York

Big Reach: Johnson, a 30-year radio veteran who has held his corporate role since 2016, oversees programming for 42 R&B/hip-hop, adult R&B and gospel stations. Add to that his programming of WNBW (Radio 103.9), and he has the labels' attention.

Been There: Among the songs Johnson has championed are Childish Gambino's "Redbone" and Sevyn Streeter's "Before I Do." He even invited both artists on to his weekly conference call with Cumulus' R&B/hip-hop program directors. But he stresses that he does not "push down music" to his team. Rather, he gives them "as much ammunition as I can to make decisions."

ALFRED LIGGINS III*

CEO, Urban One

55 Stations Strong: Liggins, who succeeded his mother, Urban One co-founder Cathy Liggins Hughes, as CEO in 1997, operates the largest African American-owned U.S. broadcaster (which until 2017 went by the name of Radio One) -- and one that is focused on black culture -- with 55 radio stations, cable network TV One and digital division Interactive One.

CONNIE ORLANDO*

Executive vp/head of programming, BET

JESSE COLLINS, 48

Founder/CEO, Jesse Collins Entertainment; producer

New Edition Of Success: Two wins from Orlando's first full year as executive vp came courtesy of Collins-produced programming. In June, the BET Awards drew 4.3 million total viewers -- making it the top cable awards show in the key 18-49 demographic for the fourth consecutive year -- and in September, the producer followed up his 2017 biopic smash, *The*

New Edition Story, with *The Bobby Brown Story*, which drew 6.6 million viewers over two nights.

Up Next: Projects on deck include *American Soul*, a scripted Collins production inspired by *Soul Train* icon Don Cornelius, and a Salt-N-Pepa tour docuseries. “Music has always been in our DNA,” says Orlando. “We’re getting back to it in a real way.”

REGGIE ROUSE, 53

Urban format captain, Entercom; program director, WVEE Atlanta

Portfolio Growth: Rouse successfully navigated last fall’s merger of CBS Radio and Entercom, retaining the corporate programming stripes he held at CBS and increasing the portfolio of stations he oversees to nine. At his Atlanta home base, WVEE (V-103) was No. 3 overall with a 6.9 share in the August Nielsen ratings.

Exaggerated Reports: The programmer says that rumors of radio’s demise are premature. “There’s a lot of spin out there, but radio is still a very powerful medium when it comes to advertising [and] making a difference in listeners’ lives,” he says, citing V-103’s voter registration drives and other community outreach.

RON “MILLS” TRIANA, 47

Program director, Hip-Hop Nation/Shade 45, SiriusXM

Discovery Channel: Mills’ ear for fresh talent led to early exposure for 6ix9ine, Juice WRLD, Roddy Ricch and the late XXXTentacion to SiriusXM’s 33.5 million subscribers.

Balancing Act: Mills, who uses the social media handle “War Chief” as an homage to his favorite film, 1979’s *The Warriors*, says his biggest challenge at the two channels he programs is appealing to a broad age demo. “I’m trying to stay in the pocket of 13- to 35 [-year-olds],” he says. “It’s tough to keep everyone happy on the younger and older crowds, but I think we do well.”

DOC WYNTER, 57

Executive vp urban/hip-hop programming strategy, iHeartMedia; program director, KRRL Los Angeles

A Very Good 2018: Promoted to his current position in January, Wynter is celebrating his 30th anniversary with the broadcasting behemoth.

Fresh Air: “Hip-hop is on fire,” and that presents a challenge for rap radio programmers “because you have other formats playing more and more of our product,” explains Wynter, who oversees programming for 70 stations.

JOSH BINDER, 43

Partner, Rothenberg Mohr & Binder

Cheered On Kendrick: As the attorney for Top Dawg Entertainment and its artists -- including SZA, ScHoolboy Q and company founder Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith -- Binder says his year was made when client Kendrick Lamar won the Pulitzer Prize for *DAMN*. “That’s career-defining,” he says.

Lawyers As Label Executives: Because artists can blow up fast without a label deal in place, Binder says they must be prepared to “operate as independent artists with their own businesses.” That’s where the new firm he co-founded earlier in 2018 with partners Jeremy Mohr and Paul Rothenberg comes into play. “In many instances,” says Mohr, “we’re running a label [for a client] before we get a record company to do it for us.”

DREW FINDLING, 58

Attorney; Founder, Findling Law Firm

Hip-Hop Defender: The attorney dubbed #BillionDollarLawyer by his clients won an acquittal in 2017 for Waka Flocka Flame, who had been charged with carrying a concealed

weapon into a Georgia airport, and in February got all charges dropped against Migos member Quavo, who was accused of an altercation with Eric Da Jeweler at a Grammy afterparty.

Just Kids: Findling says the reason for his popularity with the hip-hop crowd is that he's a mentor figure as well as a formidable defense attorney. "I'm not a fan," he says. "Waka Flocka is just Juaquin [Malphurs] to me. Gucci [Mane] is just Radric Davis. They're just kids -- nice kids, to me." They visit Findler's office not just for legal advice, but for tips on getting health insurance, to talk about family and sometimes just to hang out. On Trippie Redd's 19th birthday, he says, "We sat and ate pizza together. He can be a kid with me."

BRIAN MCMONAGLE, 59

Partner, McMonagle Perri McHugh Mischak Davis

JOE TACOPINA, 52

Founder/Partner, Tacopina & Siegel

Freed Meek: The high-profile defense attorneys teamed to convince the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that their client Meek Mill should be freed on bail, rather than spend two to four years in prison for violating his probation on a 10-year-old conviction. Mill went free in April, and the two attorneys are now seeking to have Judge Genece Brinkley, who sentenced Mill to prison, removed from the case -- because of an alleged grudge she harbors against the rapper -- and, ultimately, to overturn Mill's conviction. "She is the only roadblock," says Tacopina. "And that roadblock will be moved."

Philadelphia Freedom: "After months of watching him languish in custody," recalls McMonagle, "bringing Meek to Wells Fargo [Center] so that he could ring the bell to start the [76ers] game was one of the best experiences I've ever had as a lawyer."

JULIAN PETTY, 41

Partner/head of the entertainment practice, Nixon Peabody

Gambino Attorney: After negotiating A Tribe Called Quest's Vans sneaker line earlier in 2018, Petty cut the deal that brought Donald Glover, aka Childish Gambino, to RCA Records. In May, Gambino netted his first Hot 100 No. 1 with "This Is America."

Legacy Protector: Petty is a big proponent of securing clients ownership of their work. "More than 75 percent of the major-label deals I've done in the last 19 months have been license agreements where the artist owns the asset and can pass it on to their heirs," says the former Def Jam intern. He adds, "Legacy clients like A Tribe Called Quest and the estate of The Notorious B.I.G. are very important brands that many companies want to be in business with. They should have the same opportunities as legacy rock acts."

MARCIE ALLEN, 45

Founder/president, MAC Presents

Experience Counts: Allen put together what a source says is a seven-figure deal between Khalid and North American retailer Hollister, which raised the "Young, Dumb & Broke" singer's profile with its youthful demographic, introduced Khalid's fashion line and even featured a philanthropic component to benefit at-risk students. MAC Presents also paired Travis Scott with Red Bull and brokered partnerships for Eminem. "We're an experiential agency," says Allen, who is also an adjunct professor at New York University. "We bring every idea to life."

JENNIFER BREITHAAPT*

Global consumer chief marketing officer, Citi

Jay, Bey, Em & Post: Breithaupt says her team gave Citi card members exclusive access to over 600 R&B and hip-hop shows, including performances by Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Post Malone,

Logic, Eminem, Khalid and Big Sean. “With millions of card members across the globe,” says Breithaupt, “it’s essential that we’re reflecting their diverse music preferences and offering access to the most influential artists of our day.”

WALTER FRYE, 38

Vp global brand content and engagement, American Express

All-Star Deals: A blowout partnership with Drake and Louis Vuitton designer Virgil Abloh at Art Basel in Miami was the highlight of a year that also included a members-only Kendrick Lamar soiree presented with Turner Sports during NBA All-Star Weekend in February.

Following Fans: “We follow the passions of our card members,” says Frye, who has tied Amex to three of the hottest hip-hop tours of the year: Drake, J. Cole and Childish Gambino.

CHIEF JOHNSON, 39

Manager of entertainment marketing, Puma GROUP

Puma's Star Catcher: In the year since Johnson left Los Angeles-based lifestyle brand Young & Reckless to join PUMA, he has helped bring over Nipsey Hussle, Yo Gotti and Meek Mill. Mill partnered with PUMA for a line of T-shirts promoting “Stay Woke,” his first new single since his release from prison earlier in 2018. All proceeds went to Gathering for Justice, a criminal-justice-reform organization. Says Johnson: “I’ve probably lived four or five lives, and I’m in that phase where the more knowledge I gain, the more I want to pass it down to other kids.”

STEVE STOUTE, 48

Founder/CEO, UnitedMasters, Translation

Fresh Direct: Stoute quietly raised \$70 million from investors including Alphabet, Andreessen Horowitz and 20th Century Fox to found UnitedMasters, a digital-only distribution service that will allow artists to connect directly with consumers.

Matchmaker: Translation, the agency Stoute co-founded with Jay-Z in 2008, paired Dapper Dan with Gucci and, he says, steered Google.org to a \$2 million donation for Chance the Rapper’s SocialWorks and Chicago schools. “My approach is to get big institutions to understand what matters in culture and play a role,” he says.

JON WEXLER, 47

Global vp entertainment and influencer marketing, Adidas

Earned His Stripes: A savant at creating viral experiences that merge hip-hop, style, sports and youth culture, Wexler has forged newsmaking brand partnerships such as Kanye West’s thriving YEEZY line and the 16-year Adidas executive’s 2018 magnum opus: 747 Warehouse Street, a two-day event tied to NBA All-Star Weekend that included a celebrity basketball competition with teams led by Snoop Dogg and 2 Chainz, a music festival and, he says, “a dozen exclusive new sneakers.”

**Declined to provide age*

A committee of Billboard editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2018 R&B/Hip-Hop Power list, including, but not limited to, Billboard’s 2017 Top Artists and Top Tours rankings; nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors; impact on consumer behavior as measured by such metrics as chart, sales and streaming performance, social media impressions, and radio and TV audiences reached using the latest data available as of Sept. 13; career trajectory; and overall impact in the industry are also considered. When available, financial results are taken into consideration. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was consulted using Nielsen Music’s market share for album plus track-equivalent and streaming-equivalent album consumption units, and Billboard’s quarterly top 10 publisher rankings. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard Boxscore and Nielsen Music are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Nielsen is also the source for radio audience metrics. Unless otherwise noted, album streaming figures cited

represent U.S. on-demand audio totals, and song and artist streaming figures represent U.S. on-demand audio and video totals.

Contributors: Trevor Anderson, Megan Armstrong, Camille Dodero, Josh Glicksman, Bianca Gracie, Jenn Haltman, Steven J. Horowitz, William E. Ketchum III, Carl Lamarre, Brooke Mazurek, Gail Mitchell, Keith Murphy, Paula Parisi, Dan Rys, Eric Spitznagel, Phyllis Stark, Desire Thompson, Jack Tregoning, Deborah Wilker, Nick Williams, Xander Zellner

[This article originally appeared in the Sep. 29 issue of Billboard.](#)