



Atlanta, We Did It! A Look Back at the Unforgettable 8th Annual ISSA Awards Show & Summit



From August 20–22, the city of Atlanta became the epicenter of independent music as ISSA artists and industry professionals from around the globe descended upon Georgia for the 8th Annual ISSA Awards Show and Summit. And what a weekend it was!

The excitement and exuberance kicked off bright and early Thursday morning with the start of the Summit at the Courtyard by Marriott in Dunwoody. Our incredible lineup of session leaders set the tone immediately—**Tamanie Dove, Angela Marie Eidenmiller, John Pineiro, Linda Marks, Katherine**

Lynn Nemeth, and Emily Finke delivered powerful, insightful sessions that had everyone taking notes and making connections.



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Welcome to Our "Special Edition" Newsletter

This month, we're doing things a little differently. This issue is our **Special Edition**, packed with photos highlighting the Awards Show, the Summit, and—of course—the infamous host hotel late-night courtyard sessions.

We'll still have industry news included after the ISSA portion, and next month we'll be back with our "normal" newsletter format. But for now, grab a cup of coffee, scroll through the memories, and relive the magic of Atlanta 2026.

Thank you to every artist, attendee, volunteer, and staff member who made this weekend possible. We can't wait to do it all again in 2027! ✨

As attendees arrived at the Summit check-in on Thursday morning, they were greeted with more than just warm smiles and name badges—they were handed one of the most talked-about items of the weekend: the **T-Mobile Thermal Swag Bag!**

These weren't your average goodie bags. The stylish thermal totes were packed with thoughtful treasures that had everyone buzzing before the first session even began.

Inside, attendees found:

- **Drink tumblers** that quickly became the must-have accessory of the weekend (and kept iced coffee and cocktails at the perfect temperature!)
- A delightful assortment of **stickers, music ducks, and even pet rocks**—quirky keepsakes that brought plenty of smiles
- **Notebooks and pens** for capturing all those "aha!" moments during the Summit sessions
- **Koozies and coupons** from our generous sponsors
- And who could forget the **cool hand sanitizers** provided by the one and only **Katrina Lynn**—a practical (and stylish) touch that everyone appreciated!

The excitement was palpable as attendees traded stickers, lapel pins and compared their goodies in the lobby. It set the perfect tone for a weekend of learning, networking, and community.



The energy didn't stop when Thursday's sessions ended. **Andy Smith, Sam George, and Amy Jo** brought their "Tracks on Trial" podcast right into the host hotel lobby, turning it into an impromptu listening room. And as the sun went down, **Chad Rivette** took over with his legendary Thursday night Karaoke and Jam session—the courtyard was packed, the laughter was loud, and the bonds were being forged that would last the whole weekend.





Friday kept the momentum rolling with another full day of Summit sessions, led by **Jeremy Edmond, Randie O'Neil, Emo LeBlanc, and Alan Garmonsway**. But the highlight of the day came when **Keynote Speaker Sam George** closed out the Summit with an inspiring and thought-provoking speech on AI in music—leaving everyone with plenty to ponder as they headed out for the evening.



As the Summit sessions wound down on Friday afternoon, everyone gathered in the Conference Room for one final, thrilling moment before **Keynote Speaker Sam George** took the stage: the **Summit Raffle Drawing!**

The energy in the room was electric as names were called and prizes were awarded. Attendees clutched their raffle tickets, eyes locked on the stage, hoping to hear their name called. And when the final prize was announced—the stunning **Handcrafted Cigar Box Guitar** donated by **Stogie Joe**—the room erupted. The lucky winner? **Cherelle Jardine**, who beamed as Stogie Joe presented her with the one-of-a-kind instrument.

Raffle Winners

From Polyverse Music:

- Linda Boles - All Polyverse Plug-ins
 - Dorie Dupin - All Polyverse Plug-ins
 - Dave Plekkenpol - All Polyverse Plug-ins
-

From Atomic Disc:

- 200 CD Duplicating Package – Linda Boles
 - 200 CD Duplicating Package – Katrina Lynn
-

From Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars:

- 1 Handmade Cigar Box Guitar – Cherelle Jardine



From AIAIAI Audio:

- 1 Pair of Wireless Headphones – Jak Fiddler
-

From PSP Audioware:

- 15 Plug-ins – Sue Garmonsway
 - 10 Plug-ins – Joey Walsh
 - 5 Plug-ins – Tina Walsh
-

From SkinSessed - Provided by Tamanie Dove:

- Gift Box – Deby Kelley
 - Gift Box – Roseann Sureda
 - Gift Box – Linda Boles
 - Gift Box – Stacy Whetsel
 - Gift Box – Debbie Cooper
-

From Anonymous:

- Loaded Thermal Backpack – Jak Fiddler
- Loaded Thermal Backpack – Angela Eidenmiller
- Loaded Thermal Backpack – Katrina Lynn
- Loaded Thermal Backpack – Roseann Sureda
- Loaded Thermal Backpack – Emily Finke

A massive thank you to all our generous sponsors who made these prizes possible: **Polyverse Music, Atomic Disc, Stogie Joe Cigar Box Guitars, AIAIAI Audio, PSP Audioware, Tamanie Dove – SkinSessed.** Your support means the world to our community!

And to all our winners—congratulations! We hope you're enjoying your prizes!

What an evening it was! The ISSA Pre-Party at **Wild Wing Cafe in Alpharetta** was packed to the brim with incredible live performances. The crowd was treated to sets by:

- **Steve Coughlin**
- **Rachel Dee Lynn**
- **Jared Daws**
- **Lexi Blue**
- **The Hungry and Dangerous**

The music, the food, and the energy set the perfect stage for what was to come.



Then came Saturday—the big day!

The Red Carpet Experience kicked off at noon, and it was a spectacle to behold. From the insightful interviews to the stunning photography stations and the always-captivating **360 video booth**, everyone looked and felt like a star.







Then the doors opened to the hall, and the moment we'd all been waiting for finally arrived: the *8th Annual ISSA Awards Show*.

The stage came alive with breathtaking performances from:

- The Low Down Dirty Heathens
- Angel Ocasio Jr.
- Birdy Young
- Eleyet McConnell
- Brett Ryder

As the prestigious crystal awards were handed out, the room erupted in cheers, tears, and standing ovations. Every winner's moment was a testament to the incredible talent in this community.



After the final award was presented and the group photos were taken, the celebration moved to Wild Wing Cafe in Alpharetta for the now-famous ISSA After Party. And wow—did we celebrate! Laughter, hugs, and a few late-night toasts made it a night to remember.

It was a weekend of learning, networking, camaraderie, performing, making new friends, and catching up with old ones. From the courtyard sessions at the host hotel that stretched late into the night to the inspiring conversations in between sessions, this was truly our best year yet.





Your 2026 ISSA Award Winners!

2026 ISSA AWARDS USA WINNERS

USA ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Brett Ryder
Silver – Lexie Blue
Bronze – Dalton Jones



USA FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – Birdy Young
Silver – Katrina Lynn
Bronze – Roseann Sureda



USA MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – AK Cody
Silver – John Michael Ferrari
Bronze – Angel Dwell



USA FEMALE RISING STAR

KRISTENicole



USA MALE RISING STAR

Dreydon Gordon



MALE BEST DRESSED

ANDREW DEAN

FEMALE BEST DRESSED

Deby Kelley & Dorie Dupin

Mystic Rose



USA BAND OF THE YEAR

Gold – The Low Down Dirty Heathens Band

Silver – BrandiWyne

Bronze – Steve Coughlin with Probable Cause



USA FEMALE ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Gold – Kris Angelis – “Le Sigh”

Silver – Marie Norris – “Reflections”

Bronze – Nikki Benbrooks – “In My Dreams”



USA MALE ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Gold – Jak Fiddler – “Requiem”
Silver – Roger Fournier – “Erase 7”
Bronze – Rob Cunningham – “Carrownisky Strand”



USA FEMALE SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – Markey Blue – “Show The World What Love Is”
Silver – Jay El Dee – “I’ll Be Fine, Right?”
Bronze – Alena Rae – “How Can I Go On Without You”



USA MALE SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – Rich Allen – “The Ghosts We Keep”
Silver – Tay Bronson – “Golf Cart”
Bronze – Michael Botte – “Broken”



USA BAND SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – The Major Resolve – “On My Way”
Silver – Fated In Faith – “Cover Song”
Bronze – Andrew Dean & the Farm Machine – “Find A Way”



USA FEMALE SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Re Mattei
Silver – Katherine Lynn Nemeth
Bronze – Linda Boles



USA MALE SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Charles Taber
Silver – Jeff Greenleaf
Bronze – Jeremy Edmond



USA VOCAL DUO OF THE YEAR

Gold – Wheeler & Son (Cliff & Garret)
Silver – Mystic Rose
Bronze – Emily E. Finke & Andy Smith



MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR

Gold – Danni Elise
Silver – Keith Brooks
Bronze – Scott Parker



MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR

Gold – Chris Chitsey – “Where Ya Been Girl”
Silver – Mark Ware – “Lost One”
Bronze – Tristan Roberson – “I Can’t Get Over You”



USA FEMALE EMERGING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – Rachel Dee Lynn
Silver – Randie O’Neil
Bronze – Luana Sandoval



USA MALE EMERGING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – Jay Luke
Silver – John DeRosa
Bronze – Billy Lassi



USA RADIO STATION OF THE YEAR

Gold – James Michael Hollenstein – The Record Machine Show
Silver – Jeff Tucker – Front Row Radio
Bronze – Rick Dayton – EMM Radio



SOUND ENGINEER OF THE YEAR

Austin Davis



USA REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR

Linda Marks – Boston

2026 ISSA AWARDS INTERNATIONAL WINNERS

INTERNATIONAL ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Sherise D’Souza – IN

Silver – Mandi Leigh – CA

Bronze – Rik Reese – CA



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – Shalaine Stebner – CA
Silver – Kelly Cobbett – UK
Bronze – Demi McMahon – UK



INTERNATIONAL MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

Gold – 2 Stereo – VE
Silver – Samuel George – ES
Bronze – Wolfe Milestone – CA



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE RISING STAR

Traci Kennedy – CA



INTERNATIONAL MALE RISING STAR

Michele Annunziata – IT



INTERNATIONAL BAND OF THE YEAR

Gold – Riley’s Cove – UK
Silver – Lense – CA
Bronze – Chris Andres Band – CA



INTERNATIONAL MALE ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Gold – Luis Salsaone – CR – “La Salsa De Costa Rica”
Silver – Harry Kappen – MX – “Four”
Bronze – Darrin Walters – CA – “Blood And Grace”



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Gold – Fiona Ross – UK – “Moments In My Notebook”

Silver – Hayley Verrall – CA – “Echoes Of Canada”

Bronze – Ahshi – CA – “Who The Frick Is Ahshi”



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – Malissa Whitehouse – UK – “Over A Lifetime”

Silver – Danny Myler – DE- “Drunk Enough”

Bronze – Ruth Manning – CA – “Hot Mess”



INTERNATIONAL MALE SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – Andy Smith – **AU** – “LLT”

Silver – Aaron Halliday – CA – “Watching The Sun Meet Blue”

Bronze – Nige B – CA – “Chase It”



INTERNATIONAL BAND SINGLE OF THE YEAR

Gold – Rosie’s Smokehouse Deluxe – CA – “Hellhounds On My Trail”

Silver – Synthetik Blonde – CA – ” A Cold Romance”

Bronze – Engage – CA – “Unbattered”



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Dahlia Wakefield – CA

Silver – Joy Adams – NZ

Bronze – Cherelle Jardine – CA



INTERNATIONAL MALE SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

Gold – Neil Faulkner & Christopher Brown – UK

Silver – Whitey Somers – CA

Bronze – Kelain James – UK



INTERNATIONAL VOCAL DUO OF THE YEAR

Gold – Sun Pinned Leaves – UK
Silver – Pamela Ward & Paul Cherrington – UK
Bronze – Glimtvis – DK



MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR

Gold – Michele Annunziata – IT
Silver – Raffaella Piccirillo – IT
Bronze – Danny Myler – DE



INTERNATIONAL MUSIC VIDEO

Gold – Malissa Whitehouse – UK – “Over A Lifetime”
Silver – Cherelle Jardine – CA – “It’s A Beautiful Day”
Bronze – Emilie Thorsby – DK – “Late Night”



INTERNATIONAL FEMALE EMERGING ARTIST

Gold – Carol Stevens – UK
Silver – Tara Kye Maines – CA
Bronze – Emma Goldberg – FR



INTERNATIONAL MALE EMERGING ARTIST

Gold – Terrence Hart – CA
Silver – Michael Hamilton – DK
Bronze – Daniel de Boer – NL



INTERNATIONAL RADIO STATION – DJ OF THE YEAR

Gold – Muriel Bessman – FR
Silver – Colin Pettitt – UK
Bronze – Bob Donaldson Radio Network – CA



INTERNATIONAL SOUND ENGINEER OF THE YEAR

Samuel George – ES



INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR

Muriel Bessman – FR



Special ISSA Awards Show Winners

We want to thank **Polyverse Music** for awarding the following **Gold Award Winners** from the 8th Annual ISSA Awards Show a complete bundle plug-in download for their outstanding achievements:

- **USA Female Vocalist of the Year – Birdy Young**
- **USA Male Vocalist of the Year – A.K. Cody**
- **USA Sound Engineer of the Year – Austin Davis**
- **International Female Vocalist of the Year – Shalene Stebner**
- **International Male Vocalist of the Year – 2 Stereo**
- **International Sound Engineer of the Year – Sam George**

We are Spotighting all of our Sponsor's this month, who have helped make having the Summit possible!





From the Listeners of The Rick Spins Radio Show

You Won An Award.... But We Can't Find You!

September's "Question of The Month" is not a question! Instead consider it a tip from your old buddy Rick!

The Simple Mistake That's Costing You Gigs, Press, and Opportunities

We had the best of intentions. After returning from the incredible ISSA Awards Show, we were fired up. We wanted to feature the talented artists who had won awards—to share their music, celebrate their achievements, and give them the spotlight they deserved on The Rick Spins Show.

So we started our work. We pulled up social media pages. We visited websites. We were ready to reach out, to ask for your songs, and to get your music on the air.

And then we hit a wall. ***No email addresses.***

Not on social media. Not on most websites. What we found instead were sleek, modern contact forms—fancy little boxes designed to capture your fans' data for your database.

But here's the thing: although **we're your fans. We're also industry professionals trying to give you an opportunity.**

The Contact Form Trap

Let's be clear: contact forms aren't inherently bad. But when they're your *only* option, you're creating a barrier. Here's why:

Forms add friction. Every extra step is a chance for someone to give up. A booking agent, a music supervisor, or a radio host doesn't want to fill out a form with their name, email, phone number, and a message—they want to copy your email address, paste it into their email client, and get on with their day.

Forms can break. As one industry expert notes, "Form plugins update. SMTP credentials expire. The form still shows 'thanks for submitting' but nobody ever gets the message." How many opportunities have vanished into the digital void because of a broken form?

Forms lack context. When someone emails you directly, you can see their name, their role, and often their organization right in the email header. That tells you how to prioritize your response. A form submission strips away that context.

The Cost of Being Unreachable

This isn't just about our frustration—this is about your livelihood.

Consider these realities:

- **B2B databases lose between 22.5% and 70% of their accuracy annually.** If you're relying solely on a form to capture contacts, you're building a database that's decaying before your eyes.
- **44% of companies estimate they lose over 10% of annual revenue due to poor data quality.** As a musician, your "revenue" is gigs, sync deals, and opportunities. How much are you leaving on the table?
- **One in five consumers change their email address when they move.** That fan who filled out your form last year? They might be gone forever.
- **The sync world moves fast.** As one music industry professional put it: "If you respond three days later, you've likely already lost the opportunity."

The Psychology of "I Don't Want Spam"

Some artists avoid listing their email because they're afraid of spam. It's a valid concern—but it's also a convenient excuse.

As one commentator observed, "Artists don't want to have an email address on their homepage since they think they will get too many emails." But here's the trade-off: **are you willing to sacrifice real opportunities to avoid a few spam messages?**

The solution is simple: use a dedicated business email address with good spam filtering. Check it regularly. Don't let the fear of junk mail cost you a life-changing connection.

What We're Seeing—And What You're Missing

We've seen it too many times to count. An artist with amazing music, a professional website, and a growing fanbase—but **no way to contact them directly**.

According to one analysis, "If you're not making it simple to contact you through your social media site or website, you're at risk of missing out on a lot." The same source notes "more than a few instances where artists missed out on big gigs or other opportunities because they were going weeks without checking their email."

Let that sink in. **Big gigs. Life-changing opportunities. Gone. Because no one could reach you.**

The Fix Is Simple

Here's what we're asking every ISSA member to do right now:

1. Put your email address on your website—clearly and prominently.

Not buried in a footer. Not hidden behind a contact form. Make it visible. Make it obvious.

2. Put your email address in your social media bios.

It takes two seconds. It could lead to your next big break.

3. Check your email regularly.

Opportunities don't wait. If someone reaches out and doesn't hear back, they move on to the next artist.

4. If you use a contact form, also list your email address as an alternative.

Give people a choice. Make it easy.

5. Use a professional email address.

YourName@YourDomain.com looks more professional than YourBandName123@gmail.com. It's a small investment that signals you're serious about your career.

Your Music Deserves to Be Heard

You worked hard to write those songs. You poured your heart into those performances. You earned that award.

Don't let a missing email address keep your music from reaching the people who want to hear it.

We want to play your music. We want to celebrate your success. But we can't do that if we can't find you.

Make it easy for us. Make it easy for booking agents. Make it easy for music supervisors. Make it easy for anyone who wants to help you take your career to the next level.

Put your email address out there. Today.

Your next opportunity is waiting.



The Rick Spins Show

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

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

Submit Your Music

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



Music Industry News!

News From Around The World That Affects All Of Us

The 30 Day AI Update: What Happened in August?

What Happened This Month

The AI music industry didn't just evolve in August—it **fractured**. Just ask anyone who attended the 2026 ISSA Summit. Last year, AI was barely on our radar—a distant curiosity. Within months, it became our worst enemy, threatening our very livelihood. But at this year's Summit, something interesting happened: the conversation had shifted again.

Artists were talking about AI not as an existential threat, but as a tool that—used properly for marketing, release planning, and other business functions—could actually help indie artists who can't afford full PR or marketing firms.



The message from our speakers was clear: **Don't be afraid of the word AI. Be afraid of who is using it improperly.**

That message couldn't be more timely. Because this month, the industry delivered some of the most significant developments yet.

What You Need To Know This Month

Spotify's "AI Persona" Badge Goes Live

The headline: Starting mid-September, Spotify is rolling out a new **"AI Persona"** badge for artist profiles built around AI-generated identities that "do not represent a real person".

How it works:

- The badge appears on artist profiles, in search results, and across playlist track listings
- Music from flagged profiles is **excluded from all personalized recommendations**—no Discover Weekly, no algorithmic playlists
- Artists can self-disclose their AI Persona status through Spotify for Artists starting August 11
- Spotify will also use "human reviewers and AI investigative tools" to identify profiles

Important distinction: This badge is about the **artist's public identity**, not how the music was made. A human artist using AI for production tools **will not receive this badge**.

What this means for you: AI personas can no longer compete with you for algorithmic visibility. But you need to make sure your profile is properly verified as a human artist.

Suno Cracks Down on Downloads

The headline: Starting September 3, Suno is imposing strict download limits on its users.

The new limits:

User Tier	Price	Download Limit
Free	\$0	7 total downloads (lifetime)
Pro	\$8/month	20 downloads per month
Premier	\$24/month	60 downloads per month

Suno Studio users (the professional package) will be unaffected.

Why now? Officially, Suno says the limits will "make it harder for bad actors to mass-export music". The company is also adding **audio watermarking and fingerprinting** to all generated tracks.

The timing tells a different story: Suno is still being sued by Universal and Sony in a Massachusetts federal court. On August 25, UMG and Sony filed an amended complaint formally adding a Digital Millennium Copyright Act claim alleging "**stream ripping**"—that Suno used tools like YTDLP to bypass YouTube's technical protections and harvest training data. Fact discovery in the case closes September 30.

What this means for you: The flood of AI spam on streaming services may finally slow down. But if you use Suno, your downloads are now capped—plan accordingly.

Suno Inks Licensing Deal with BMG

The headline: On August 12, Suno announced a global licensing deal with **BMG**, the world's fourth-largest music company.

The details:

- The deal covers both BMG's recorded music and publishing repertoire
- BMG artists and songwriters **who choose to participate** will be compensated
- The deal **settles claims over Suno's prior use** of BMG's music in training
- Suno is preparing to launch its first AI model "developed in partnership with the music industry"

The bigger picture: BMG is the **second major rights holder** to strike a deal with Suno, following Warner Music Group nine months ago. Universal and Sony remain locked in litigation.

What this means for you: Major labels are picking sides. Some are licensing to AI companies; others are fighting them in court. If you're signed to a label that strikes an AI deal, make sure you understand how it affects you.

Major Labels Invest in Stability AI

The headline: Universal, Sony, and Warner all took equity in **Stability AI** by joining a **\$76 million Series B funding round**.

What this means: The same labels suing Suno are investing in a different AI company. The music industry isn't anti-AI—they're anti-**unlicensed** AI. They want a seat at the table and a cut of the revenue.

What this means for you: AI isn't going anywhere. The question is who gets paid and who controls the terms.

Luminate Launches AI Identification Framework

The headline: On August 25, Luminate—the data company powering Billboard's charts—announced a framework to identify and measure AI-generated music.

The labels:

- **"AI Generated"** — for fully AI-created songs
- **"AI"** — for artists confirmed as fully AI-generated
- **"Human"** — for artists individually cleared by Luminate's screening process

Important: The Human tag will only go to artists individually cleared, not by default. An absent label does not confirm a track is human-made.

What this means for you: The industry is building infrastructure to track AI music at scale. Expect these labels to start appearing on charts and in data reports later this year.

Spotify Inks Kobalt AI Deal

The headline: On August 13, Spotify signed a licensing agreement with **Kobalt** for its upcoming AI-powered covers and remixes tool.

The details: This is Spotify's **first AI deal with a publisher outside of Universal Music Group**, following similar deals with UMG and Merlin.

What this means for you: Spotify is building a massive AI covers and remixes tool. If your music is represented by a publisher that has struck a deal, your songs could be included. **Ask:** "Am I opted in? What am I being paid? And can I opt out?"

The Public Is Getting Sick of AI

The headline: According to Krystle Delgado's latest analysis, "**everyone is getting sick of AI**".

The data:

- A **University of Alberta study** found that **87% of Canadian musicians view generative AI "negatively"** and are actively avoiding it
- **Bette Midler** condemned an AI-generated song that reached the charts
- **Doja Cat** called Tyga "a penis for making an AI album"
- **Pitchfork** gave Tyga's AI-assisted album a rare **0/10**—the lowest score in 19 years

What this means for you: The AI backlash is real and getting louder. Your humanity is becoming a **competitive advantage**, not a liability.

The Bottom Line

The message from this year's ISSA Summit was clear: AI isn't going away. But neither are we. The lawsuits are working. The platforms are taking sides. And the public is increasingly skeptical of AI music.

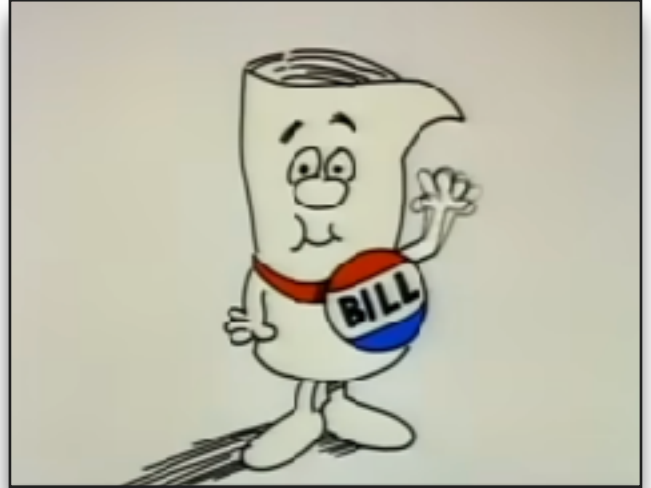
Here's what you should do this month:

1. **Check your Spotify for Artists account.** Make sure your profile is properly verified and won't get mislabeled as an AI Persona.
2. **If you use Suno, understand the new download limits.** Starting September 3, your downloads are capped. Plan accordingly.
3. **Ask the critical question:** If your label or publisher has struck an AI deal, ask: "*Am I opted in? What am I being paid? And can I opt out?*"
4. **Keep making real music.** Your humanity is your competitive advantage. The data proves it.

YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: POST-SUMMIT REALITY CHECK – THE CLOCK IS TICKING

What a month it has been. Our ISSA Awards Show and Summit were nothing short of spectacular—a celebration of the incredible talent, passion, and resilience that defines this community. Seeing so many of you in person, sharing stories and strategies, reminded me why we fight for these issues in the first place.

But while we were celebrating, Washington kept spinning—or rather, *not* spinning, as the case may be. With all the excitement of the Summit, it's easy to lose track of what's happening (or *not* happening) on Capitol Hill. So let's take a breath, catch up, and get real about where we stand.



The Hard Truth: What *Hasn't* Happened

Let's start with the frustrating part.

The American Music Fairness Act (AMFA) – the bill that would finally close the AM/FM radio loophole and unlock hundreds of millions in overseas royalties for American artists – remains stalled. As of the latest action on [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov), the measure is still at the introduced stage. The markup that was scheduled back in April? ***Still hasn't happened.***

The Living Wage for Musicians Act (LWMA) – the bill that would create a penny-per-stream royalty – has seen no federal movement. While a second push is reportedly in the works with a reintroduction expected next month, ***it hasn't advanced.***

The TRAIN Act and **CLEAR Act** – the AI transparency bills – remain in committee.

And **the NO FAKES Act**, which passed the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously back in June? It still sits on the Senate Calendar, waiting for a floor vote that hasn't come.

What *Has* Happened

But it's not all silence. There were some bright spots in August worth noting.

On August 19, **SoundExchange honored hip-hop legend MC Lyte with the Music Fairness Award** for her tireless advocacy on artist radio royalties, including her push for the AMFA. She joined DMC (RUN-DMC's Darryl McDaniels) and Melle Mel on Capitol Hill to meet with key lawmakers about the AMFA and urge its passage. This kind of high-profile advocacy keeps the pressure on.

The Living Wage for Musicians Act is reportedly getting a second push, with a reintroduction planned for next month. In advance of that, ***there's a chance to lend your support and build momentum.***

The Protect Working Musicians Act (PWMA) – which would allow independent artists to collectively negotiate with streaming platforms and AI developers – was introduced in June by Rep. Deborah Ross. The American Federation of Musicians hosted a virtual forum on August 6th to discuss it.

The 2026 Midterms: Why This Moment Matters

Here's what every ISSA member should know: **in just over two months, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 33 seats in the Senate will be up for election.**

That means every single member of Congress is either fighting to keep their job or trying to get one. They are *listening* right now in a way they won't be in November. They are attending town halls, shaking hands, and asking what matters to you.

And what matters to us is simple:

- **Fair pay for radio play (AMFA)**
- **Fair pay for streaming (LWMA)**
- **Protection from AI exploitation (NO FAKES, TRAIN, CLEAR)**
- **The power to collectively negotiate (PWMA)**

Your Call to Action: There's Still Time

Just because Congress is on recess doesn't mean we should be silent. In fact, this is our best window. Your representatives are *home*. They're accessible. They're asking for your vote.

Here's what you can do *right now*:

1. Contact your Representative and Senators.

Call their district office. Show up at a town hall. Send an email. Tell them:

"I am a musician and a voter in your district. I want you to cosponsor and push for a vote on the American Music Fairness Act, the Living Wage for Musicians Act, the NO FAKES Act, the TRAIN Act, the CLEAR Act, and the Protect Working Musicians Act. This is a voting issue for me."

2. Get informed.

Know where your representatives stand. Ask the tough questions. Use social media. Attend local events. Make fair pay for musicians a campaign issue.

3. Talk to each other.

The connections we made at the Summit are powerful. Keep the conversations going. Share strategies. Build a network that won't be ignored.

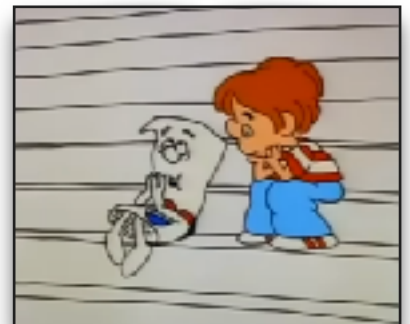
The Bottom Line

We have just over two months to make our voices heard before the ballots are cast. The bills we've been tracking for months are stalled – but they're not dead. They just need the right push at the right time.

That time is now.

Congress may be on vacation, but we can't be. The \$300 million in European royalties is at stake. Fair streaming pay is at stake. Protection from AI is at stake. Your livelihood is at stake.

Get involved. Get informed. And make a difference.



Every month we receive questions about various subject from our members. We have decided to share these questions and our answers as you might be asking the same questions!

This month we have 2 questions that were brought up during conversations in the hotel at the Summit. Question 1:

“What exactly are Super Fans and how do I find them?”



The "Superfan" Myth Has Been Busted—But Here's What Indie Artists Actually Do About It

If you've been paying attention to the music business press lately, you've seen the panic. Everyone from Spotify to the major labels is obsessed with the "Superfan Strategy." They know they've monetized the casual listener, but they can't figure out how to unlock the true value of the committed fan.

A recent article in *Music Business Worldwide* dropped a truth bomb that shook the boardrooms: **The industry can't identify a single superfan by name.**

They ran the data on a major album release and found three completely different types of superfans:

1. **The Spender** (paid \$677, streamed it 14 times).
2. **The Streamer** (played it 971 times, spent \$7.99).
3. **The Community Leader** (sent 474 messages, pressed play once).

The industry's fatal flaw? They treat these three people as the same customer with the same offer. Worse, they can't connect the dots because the merch store, the ticketer, and the DSP don't talk to each other.

So, as independent artists, do we throw our hands up and say, "Well, if the majors can't figure it out, I'm doomed!"?

Absolutely not. In fact, we have the upper hand.

The majors are drowning in fragmented data. We are swimming in direct relationships. Here is what the article *didn't* tell you—but what we as independents *must* do right now:

1. Stop selling one thing to everyone.

If you only email your list to sell merch, you are ignoring the "Streamer" who just wants early access to a playlist or a demo. If you only push streams, you are ignoring the "Spender" who wants a vinyl variant. **Segment your audience.** Send merch offers to the spenders; send behind-the-scenes content to the streamers; send VIP Zoom hangs to the community chatterboxes.

2. Reward the "Voice" differently.

The article points out that community leaders drive everyone else's purchases. These are your evangelists. They don't want a discount code; they want *status*. Give them a shoutout, a free ticket to bring a friend, or a "Street Team" badge. They will generate more revenue for you than any ad campaign.

3. Consolidate your view (It's easier than you think).

You don't need five different enterprise databases. You need a single source of truth. Use a tool like **Airtable** or **Notion**. Manually log your top commenters on Instagram, your top buyers on Bandcamp, and your top chatters in your Discord. See where they overlap. When you see a name pop up across all three, *that* is your unicorn superfan—and now you know them by name.

4. Build the bridge they can't.

The majors can't link your Spotify streams to your Shopify store. But *you* can. Use a "Link in Bio" tool that tracks clicks, or better yet, use a simple URL slug (like yoursite.com/superfan) exclusively for your most engaged followers. Use QR codes at your physical shows that lead to a unique merch page. Connect the dots yourself.

5. Ask the question directly.

The legacy industry relies on algorithms to guess who the superfans are. You have a voice. Send a poll to your mailing list: "*Do you prefer buying vinyl, streaming my music 24/7, or chatting with other fans?*" Let them self-identify. Then, treat them accordingly.

The Bottom Line:

The *MBW* article is a wake-up call for the dinosaurs. But for the International Singer-Songwriters Association? It's a confirmation of what we already know.

We don't need a "Superfan Strategy." We need a "Real Fan Relationship."

The industry is paralyzed because they can't see the whole fan. We don't have that excuse. We are small enough to care, and independent enough to act. Stop chasing the mythical "whale" and start nurturing the three pillars of your career: The Wallet, The Ears, and The Voice.

They are all in your DMs right now. Go say hello to them by name.

This month we have 2 questions that were brought up during conversations in the hotel at the Summit. Although this is a totally different question. You'll be surprised the similarities it has with the first question. Question 2:

“What’s the most asked question I get from artists?”

What Does Google Say Is The #1 Question Indie Artists Ask? (And Why That's The Wrong Question)

While at the ISSA Summit a member asked me what the most common question I get from artists is. It got me thinking—instead of just relying on my own inbox, why not ask the ultimate source? I went straight to Google to find out what the algorithm says independent musicians are searching for the most.

Here is what the data reveals.

According to a deep dive into the most frequently asked questions in the indie music scene, the number one question Google gets from independent artists is:

"How can I promote my music effectively without a major label's resources?"

It makes perfect sense, doesn't it? We are all drowning in a sea of advice about playlists, TikTok, Instagram Reels, Spotify algorithms, and email lists. The overwhelm is real. We know we need to be seen, but we don't have a major label's marketing budget or PR team to make it happen.

But here is my take on Google's answer—and why I think we are all asking the wrong question.

The Danger of the "How"

When we search for "how to promote," we are looking for a *tactic*. We want a hack, a checklist, or a formula. We want to know: *Do I post three Reels a day? Do I submit to 100 playlists? Do I run Facebook ads?*

The problem with focusing solely on the "how" is that it puts the cart before the horse. Promotion without a foundation is just noise. You can have the best marketing strategy in the world, but if you are promoting to the wrong people or without a clear identity, you are just burning time and money.

The Question We Should Be Asking Instead

Before you ask "*How do I promote?*" you need to ask a much harder, more fundamental question:

"Who is this music actually for?"

The most successful independent artists aren't necessarily the ones with the best marketing tactics. They are the ones who have a crystal-clear understanding of their *target audience*. They know exactly who their music resonates with, where those people hang out online, and what kind of message will cut through the noise.

What To Do About It

So, how do we bridge the gap between the question we are asking Google and the question we should be asking ourselves?

1. **Define Your Avatar:** Stop trying to appeal to "everyone." Get specific. Who is your ideal fan? What do they do for work? What other artists do they listen to? What problems do they have that your music solves?
2. **Build a Direct Line:** Once you know who your fan is, the best promotion isn't about reaching *more* people; it's about reaching the *right* people more deeply. This is where building an email list or a private community (like a Discord server) becomes more valuable than a viral TikTok.
3. **Create Value, Not Just Noise:** Promotion isn't just about saying "listen to my new single." It's about offering value. Share behind-the-scenes content, exclusive demos, or early access to tickets. When you promote with value, you aren't just selling; you are building a relationship.

The Bottom Line

Google's answer tells us that we are all desperate to be heard. That is a universal feeling. But the path to being heard isn't found in a Google search for a "hack." It is found in the quiet, intentional work of understanding who you are as an artist and, more importantly, who you are creating *for*.

Stop asking "*How do I promote?*" and start asking "*Who am I serving?*" The promotion strategy will follow naturally from there.

My Personal Take

The reason I love this topic is that it exposes the anxiety at the heart of the modern independent artist. We are constantly told that the music industry is a "noise competition," and we panic. We think the solution is to shout louder.

But the artists who break through aren't the loudest; they are the most *specific*. They understand that a thousand true fans who deeply connect with your work are infinitely more valuable than a million passive listeners who just scrolled past your post.

Google can tell you *what* people are searching for, but it can't tell you *why* they should care about *you*. That is a question only you can answer. Once you answer that, the "how" of promotion becomes significantly easier.

The music industry can be difficult at best, but you don't have to figure it out alone. We're here to help you both navigate the noise and understand the business behind your artistry. If you have a question or just need a little guidance, don't be afraid to reach out to Todd. Drop him a line anytime.

issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com — we'd love to hear from you!

Every Ending Is a New Beginning

As I sit down to write this final closing article for the ISSA Summit Newsletter, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared over the past several years. What started as a vision to create something special for indie artists grew into something far bigger than I ever imagined—a true community of passionate musicians, generous sponsors, and industry professionals all united by a common belief in the power of independent music.



And this past year? It was our best yet. We were at capacity. The energy was electric. The connections were real, and we pulled it off—together.

For that, I want to say thank you.

Thank you to every artist who walked through those doors and trusted us with your talent. Thank you to our sponsors—both the ones who provided physical items that made our raffles unforgettable and the ones who offered downloadable treasures that will continue to benefit our winners long after the Summit ended. And thank you to the industry professionals who lent their time, expertise, and wisdom to help our artists grow.

You are the reason this Summit thrived. You are the reason the indie music revolution is real. And you are the reason we poured our hearts into this role for as long as we did.

As many of you have heard, I have stepped down from the Summit going forward. The wonderful Candy Carpenter has taken over that role, and I know she will carry the tradition forward with grace and dedication. This wasn't an easy decision, but it was the right one for this season of my life.

That said, I want to be very clear about something: **this is not goodbye.**

My wife Jill and I are not going away. We remain deeply, passionately committed to the indie music community and all of you who make it so vibrant.

The monthly articles and industry insights you've come to expect will continue. We will still be here, writing, sharing, and doing everything we can to help move the indie music community forward. And yes—we will still be sharing news and information that we believe ISSA members and all indie artists will find valuable.

So please, stay tuned. Stay connected. And know that our paths will cross again.

To every artist who ever read one of my articles, to every sponsor who believed in our mission, and to every industry professional who gave their time to make the Summit what it was—thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The Summit chapter may be closing, but the story is far from over.

Onward and upward.

With gratitude and hope,

Todd Apfel
(and Jill, too!)

P.S. – If you'd like to stay in touch, feel free to reach out anytime. You know how to find me. Let's keep this community alive.

A Personal Note of Gratitude to Alexx Antaeus

As I was preparing to send out this September Newsletter, I realized I had completely forgotten something, I mean someone really important! I have to take a moment to acknowledge something truly special that happened at this year's Summit. To a person, every single artist who participated in their 30-minute one-on-one session with Alexx Antaeus walked away taller. They walked away with a renewed sense of self-worth, a solid belief that they are good artists, and the empowering realization that their future is only limited by themselves. That is the gift Alexx gave those artists —not just mixing tips or marketing advice, but genuine belief.



Consider the man behind that gift. Alexx is a Grammy® Award-winning producer, the head of Antaeus Music Group, and the driving force behind Monom Records. During the busiest stretch of the year—the chaotic FYC Grammy® season—he chose to take two full days out of his impossibly packed schedule to fly to Atlanta. He didn't just show up; he was present, deeply engaged, and fiercely dedicated to helping each of those artists discover and refine "their story."

What makes me even more humbled is this: Alexx donated every single dollar he received from those sessions back to the Summit to help defray our production costs. He didn't come for the money; he came for the music and the people who make it.

Alexx, you are a true champion and a fervent believer in the Indie Music movement. On behalf of every artist you touched, every song you helped shape, and every dream you reignited—thank you. We are so incredibly grateful for your time, your talent, and your heart.

With deepest appreciation,
Todd Apfel