

# 31 POWER

Asking a cross-section of industry leaders for input generally produces a range of responses as varied as their personalities. This year's reader-voted Power 31 – in Airplay and Artists & Music categories – generated anticipated humor, stoicism, self-effacement and insight. But in revealing what they've learned about the business, their teams and themselves, almost universally they share great optimism. In arguably the greatest business storm since the Great Depression, these industry professionals are seeing rays of light.

## + PANDEMIC EDITION +



### AIRPLAY

#### 1 **ROD PHILLIPS** iHeartMedia EVP/Country Programming Strategy

I've learned very quickly how radio remains resilient, relevant and vital, particularly in the face of adversity. Our teams moved quickly to remain on-air – from our studios or from a spare bedroom – to provide information, news, companionship and entertainment.

Our teams are filled with dedicated and talented folks. We have so many examples of talent, PDs, MDs, promotion directors and others who literally put the responsibility of being a broadcaster at the forefront of their day. Their response to a natural phenomenon like we've never experienced should be commended.

And I've learned that working from home can be a terrific fringe benefit, avoiding the commute and getting more face time with the family. But even that is an example of too much of a good thing. Getting out and in front of co-workers and actually being able to work from the radio stations seems like a treat now. The energy of what happens in the studios and working around so many talented people is truly invigorating.



Phillips (r) exploring the outdoors with his family.



#### 2 **KRISTEN WILLIAMS** Warner Music Nashville SVP/Radio & Streaming

I can't sit still for long and have organized (and re-organized) every closet, cabinet and drawer in our house. I would rather clean a toilet than sit in on a video conference call. I really don't like to cook, and I hate dirty dishes. I'm addicted to coffee, Diet Coke and the nightly news. I'm a smart woman but a terrible teacher! When the clock strikes

midnight on New Year's Eve, I will never utter the words, "next year is bound to be better." It sounds trite, but I have truly learned to appreciate what I have and to enjoy the simpler things in life.

### ARTISTS

#### 1 **JOHN ESPOSITO** Warner Music Nashville Chairman/CEO

Just as artists, songwriters, musicians and producers are finding ways to make music in isolation, fans have proven an insatiable desire to consume and connect. We've gone from being a business devastated by technology (maybe even technology resistant) to one that invents and thrives on it. Nothing compares to personal collaboration and live performance – and we're looking forward to getting back to those – but I've learned we not only have the fighting spirit, but we also have the follow-through.

I've also learned that follow-through has to extend beyond the music. We must be unrelenting in our response to social inequality and racial injustice. I am proud of Warner Music Group's endorsement of the Black Lives Matter movement and our local response. We have been incredibly proactive in fighting anti-LGBTQ legislation and other discriminatory measures. Like many others, I've learned and will continue to learn more about what we can do to extend the same support to BIPOC communities. WMG and WMN have committed substantial financial and human resources towards that pursuit, and we will continue to do so for as long as it takes.

I already knew my team is innovative as hell, unflappable and fiercely committed to our artists, our company and each other, but I have seen that this year in extraordinary ways. They're fired up to lead the charge in effectively engaging new platforms. And, like the music business itself, I've learned they're endlessly resilient.

For myself, I've learned a little more about that work-life balance thing! This extra time with my family has been irreplaceable. I've also learned that I miss the hell out of going to see live music.





**3 STEVE HODGES**  
Sony/Nashville  
EVP/Promotion & Artist Development

Our business adapted, evolved, and is succeeding at exposing our equally adaptive and creative artists and their craft. Music is at the core of human culture, has healing qualities, survives and even shines in times of difficulty.

The Sony team is even more resilient, passionate and focused on the changing landscape of our format and business than I ever thought possible. Complacency was not allowed to set in. They thrive on being disruptive and being on the cutting edge

of doing things differently. Myself? I can cut my own hair – not a pro, by any means! I can play disc golf, but not nearly as well as a few in the industry. According to my family, I'm a cornhole legend (just means I'm old), so I'm glad they don't watch the cornhole pros on ESPN!

**4 ROYCE RISSER**  
UMG/Nashville EVP/Promotion

People need music. It has been a source of comfort and escape for those who are struggling given our current world conditions. I love being part of a business that is really helping people cope with life. It may not be measurable, but it's for real.

We love each other. We miss being around each other in the office. And we are people who can quickly acclimate to the current environment ... some more easily than others. We all have challenges, but I love the adaptability of my crew.

I've learned I really do thrive being around people. In absence of that, I've learned to make a conscious decision to be positive each morning and do everything possible to enjoy this time. I also have learned that there were several things that needed to get done at my house. Didn't everyone?



**5 TIM ROBERTS**  
Entercom Country Format Captain  
Entercom/Detroit VP/Music  
Programming, WYCD PD

This is probably the greatest time of innovation I've seen in radio a long, long time. Forced by the pandemic, of course, but it has revealed how people

can really shine in radio. It has also taught us that radio is essential to many people, and we were able to disseminate a lot of information. (Ed. Note: Read Roberts' full response in *The Interview*, page 37.)

**6 CHARLIE COOK**  
Cumulus VP/Country  
Cumulus/Nashville OM, WSM-FM/Nashville PD

I've learned this is a business of people willing to step up and do their jobs when there was an enormous amount of pressure on them. We are a 24/7 business, and our business fought through this toughest of times.

Cumulus furloughed all of us for three rotating weeks over the last 17. I was shocked that every one of my team members said, "How can I help fill the holes while someone is out?" Radio is a business full of people who love their jobs and their colleagues.

As for me, that having a week off when you are not allowed to log-in to your e-mail or take a call from work is ... not all that bad.

**7 CARSON JAMES**  
BBR Music Group SVP/Promotion

Being in a business that relies on face-to-face – especially in the promotion world – no one knew how each rep would react to the new environment and how effective they would be. Very early, I saw them react with a positive attitude and determination to make it work. Creativity and perseverance were the keys. We tell all of our people, refuse to lose – and they did just that. I could not be prouder or work with a greater group of professionals. Period!

**8 KURT JOHNSON**  
Townsquare SVP/Programming



I'm reminded how vital Country radio is to its audience. At TSM, we saw 11% growth in audience share over last spring. During the shutdown, people turned to Country radio for community, for information and for their favorite songs.

I'm constantly impressed at how adaptable, strong and resilient our team is. [Dir./Country Programming] Doug Montgomery and our Country programmers didn't hesitate. They

acted individually and as a group to serve our listeners, Music Row partners and clients. I gained a whole new level of respect for this amazing group.

I have always counted my blessings, but I need to do it a lot more.

**9 KATIE DEAN**  
MCA SVP/Promotion

Me, first week of quarantine mid-March: "I'll get back into yoga, and we will train the Great Dane puppies." (Smokey goes high and two seconds later, Idgie sweeps the leg and I wind up flat on my back wondering where it all went wrong.)

Several months later, with a plethora of self-improvement projects in various stages, I'm focusing on the positives. This time forced me to take a long look in the mirror and make some necessary changes. My marriage has never been stronger. I've learned how both fragile and strong *all* of us are and how important it is to have the support of others. Our MCA team has only grown closer as each of us has moments faltering under the weight of uncertainty, but it's been so inspiring how we rally and lift each other up, usually in the form of inappropriate humor. Everyone has faced myriad challenges, and the way I'm getting through it is by expressing gratitude for the blessings I have.



Dean works on her downward dog.

**2 RANDY GOODMAN**  
Sony/Nashville Chairman/CEO

Across the industry, within my team and in myself, I've seen resilience, agility, creativity and innovation. For the Sony staff in particular, I feel overwhelming pride.



**3 SCOTT BORCHETTA**  
Big Machine Label Group President/CEO

For as long as I've been in the business, entertainment has had a high degree of resiliency. There's been a lot of talk over the last few years as to the value and relevance of record companies, so it's a bit ironic that labels continue to be very stable businesses in the eye of the COVID-19 storm. For that, we are extremely grateful.



Holding a copy of Tim McGraw's freshly signed BMLG contract.

BMLG has been working remotely since March 12, yet we're putting out as much or more music than ever. I've learned at an even greater level how empowerment and trust are truly at the core of Big Machine. There's no way we could be this productive without every single executive getting the job done. Early concerns were, "If you can't see it being done, is it getting done?" And, "Will everyone continue to be responsible and true to the

cause?" Both answers are a resounding, "Yes!" We're entrepreneurs at heart and still extremely driven by being the "machine that can."

**4 MIKE DUNGAN**  
UMG/Nashville Chairman/CEO

In the past, I have accepted and usually been driven by some rather celebrated ADHD behavior, in both conversation and action. But in this shutdown, I have come to discover some dramatically OCD dominance in everything I do. In my work, with my house (!), in my garden and in telephone conversation. Weird. And I kind of miss the ADHD.



**5 JON LOBA**  
BBR Music Group EVP

Plato was a very smart man ... necessity truly is the mother of invention. Jumping on Teams or Zoom calls was the easy part of reimagining the business. Beyond that, we are storytellers at heart and have to come up with creative ways to tell artists' stories to gatekeepers and new audiences. That has accelerated



evaluation and adoption of digital solutions. Look no further than the hologram signing of Track 45, augmented reality for Lindsay Ell's release week and a seven-HD-camera presentation to radio listeners and clients for Elvie Shane.

I'm blessed to be surrounded by an *amazing* group of professionals with servants' hearts. They take my crazy ideas and make them a reality. When we started on our elevated radio tour idea, every tech person said what we wanted didn't exist and would be exorbitantly expensive, but the team kept looking and found a solution. My biggest challenge is getting them all to take a break and breathe. We all struggle with drawing personal/professional lines in this environment.

I constantly wonder how I got anything done traveling 150-200 days a year. The reality is, I am even busier now. I would probably benefit from listening to Tolstoy: "The two most powerful warriors are patience and time." I struggle with both, because I want to do it all, and I want to do it all right now.

**6 SHANE MCANALLY**  
SmackSongs CEO  
Monument Records Co-President

I've realized our community is resilient and especially supportive when times get tough. There is a "we're all in this together" attitude up and down Music Row, and even competitors are reaching out to help and to find inventive ways to keep our rosters and teams inspired.

The biggest takeaway about our team is they love what they do. They're finding inventive ways to stay engaged and really putting in the effort to keep the wheels turning. You have to really want to get up every day and make a difference when it would be so much easier to tune it all out.

I always thought being home and sleeping late and not having a true schedule would be a dream job. It ain't. I need structure, and I need to be busy.



McAnally (l) and husband Michael Baum (r) teach their kids about personal protective equipment.

**7 CINDY MABE**  
UMG/Nashville President

Music is needed more than ever to heal, console, cheer, escape and walk people through every mood they go through. This year has brought renewed interest and appetite for all kinds of music, and the artists have created new ways to stay connected with fans.



Mabe (second from left) thrives at the music education aspect of homeschooling.

There have been moments I really worried about the mental health of our team, artists, managers and their families. We can't walk across the hall to make sure people look you in the eyes and tell you they're okay. But we forge on and are better for each other. I've learned so much from this team about work ethic and heart. I'm really proud to work with and represent them.

Personally, I've learned teachers need to be paid more money. Cooking three meals a day while on Zoom is harder than it looks. Fish sticks are okay. Love your family.

Some days are better than others. People matter more than anything else. One foot in front of the other. Don't lose focus. And in the words of Kacey Musgraves, "It'll all be alright."

**10 BECKY BRENNER**

**Albright & O'Malley & Brenner Consulting Partner**

This is something I have always known but has proven even more true during the pandemic: Radio's unique relationship with listeners and the community makes it a powerful communication tool in times of crisis. Our multi-platform distribution channels make us accessible wherever people need us.

Radio talent are resilient, innovative, passionate and dedicated to getting the job done no matter what. So many new and creative ideas have been born during this.

And me: I need more hugs! I thrive on face-to-face (not on Zoom) communication and human interaction. Isolation and quarantine are not good for my soul.



**Brenner (l) gathers with her husband (r) and children for a backyard brewfest.**

**11 JEFF GARRISON**

**Cox Country Format Leader San Antonio Dir./Operations, KCYY PD**

We all have to rethink what doing business looks like in the future. Creatively, I miss the personal interaction and vibe. It's tougher on Zoom and Teams. The good news is we will emerge from this, and I looking forward to shaking someone's hand or giving a big hug soon!

Our teams are just so resilient and can adapt even under the most trying times. I am so proud of our CMG team! Being remote has challenges, but radio pros are just scrappy.

Personally, working at home close to the kitchen is a problem – quarantine plus-15! I've also learned, now more than ever, how much people close to us matter.

**12 NATE DEATON**

**Empire KRTY/San Jose GM**

The best lesson is we are resilient and can overcome a great loss of revenue. Being locally owned and operated has its fair share of challenges, to start. Five years ago, we decided the way to survive was event-driven revenue, so between local retail and events, our spring and summer basically disappeared. But we are still in business and operating. I think/hope the worst is behind us.

This team is very productive from home. I am not sure we realized how much all the events we do was taking out of us. We have had a chance to recharge and come up with exciting ideas. I would also point out we lost our owner/mentor Bob Kieve Memorial Day weekend. He believed in being a community participant and resource, and we have all been charged to work harder to make sure his legacy is honored. We changed our legal ID to include "The Forever Home of Bob Kieve."

If I play golf four days a week, I can be pretty good again. Seriously, more than the rest of our staff, I have benefitted from not having three or four shows per week. I spent a lot of time preparing our Summer Songwriters Series that was completely washed out, but we have been able to do artist interviews every morning, and our Nashville label partners have been amazing. We have one station, and the recognition we receive is truly humbling. In the hustle and bustle, that can get lost, and I am glad to have some time to reflect on all that hard work paying off.



**Chiang (c), wife Cheryl and their children show off the latest in fashionable face masks.**

**13 JOHNNY CHIANG**

**Cox/Houston Dir./Ops, KKBQ PD**

I've learned nothing is guaranteed. Things can change in an instant, and you have to be ready to pivot. As for the team, we are resilient! When pushed to our limits and out of our comfort zones, we will rise to the challenge to not just survive

but thrive. And I love being at the station surrounded by my team. I've always known they inspire me and make me better. Quarantine has confirmed it.

**14 BOBBY BONES**

**The Bobby Bones Show Host Premiere Networks, iHeartCountry VP/Creative Dir.**

Radio taught itself it didn't have to be as rigid. We had to learn quickly that we don't have to all

be in the same room at the same time doing things the way we've always done them. With my show, we split out with most of us working from home, and I realized I don't have to be in the building every day. The cast doesn't have to be there as long, because they can do a lot of it from home. It actually made a lot



**Bones (l) and co-host Amy practice safe social distancing during the morning show.**

of the content better once we figured everything out. For me, I didn't like doing the show from my bedroom. I just bought a new house, and there's a second spot on the property where we're building out a full studio, and iHeart is paying for it because – in the long run – radio companies are learning they're going to be able to save money. We've become more efficient.

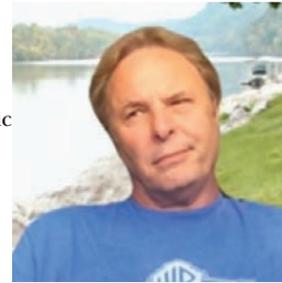
**8 SCOTT HENDRICKS**

**Warner Music Nashville EVP A&R/Creative Advisor**

I've been encouraged that people still need music in their lives, so many areas of the business haven't been as affected. Record companies continue to look for new artists and find new songs. My heart breaks for the musicians and support teams who rely on live music.

We have been very focused on mitigating the effects of the pandemic through social distancing. We are disciplined about finding new artists, even if we can't go see them live. Not only have we met more new artists, we've also spent more time seeing each other on Zoom. And we seem to have more time to listen to songs and can focus on discovering new acts without the distractions or the interruptions of the office.

I've learned to be flexible with my schedule. I love the freedom of waking up at 5am and working on my records when I am the most focused, then go mow my yard while listening to song pitches simultaneously. I seem to accomplish more in a day than before. My wife, however, prefers my old 9-5.



**9 DANN HUFF**

**Producer**

I've learned the importance of the physicality of the business. People need live music because they love the recorded music and want to experience it in a live setting. The industry is dependent on both facets.

Nothing new, but I've always been utterly dependent on my team. Collaboration is definitely king. As for myself, I need people more than I ever realized. There is so much we take for granted in subtle in-person communication. I just love being in a room with other musicians.



**10 KERRI EDWARDS**

**KP Entertainment Owner/President**

Our industry and artists are resilient and have learned to adapt and feed our fans in a different way. I have been reminded once again what an incredible team I have. We have postponed, moved tours, moved again, released new music, released an album, filmed content, filmed more, built marketing plans and more without missing a beat. We have stayed connected and looked after each other on a personal level, too.

Personally, I've learned I can film a major network TV show all by myself from a farm with little internet. Ha! But not ha. In all seriousness, this industry means even more to me, and I care greatly about it and the people involved. I count my blessings I still get to help create and brand songs that can help people through good and bad. I also miss the shows. Ready to see that connection with fans again and get back out on the road!



**Edwards (r) is joined by Clarence Spalding at Nissan Stadium during what would have been CMA Fest.**

**11 CRIS LACY**

**Warner Music Nashville EVP/A&R**

I'm keenly aware of the industry's fragility. Each day brings a new deficit, whether financially or emotionally, created by the inability to perform live music. It devastates companies and eliminates the positive feedback loop that is essential for artists' and fans' wellbeing. Too much has gone unsaid and unseen with respect to equality, inclusiveness and diversity within the business of music for too long.

You learn a lot about who you work for during times of crisis. Our global company has been incredibly proactive in risk assessment, putting people first



**With the 1991 Ford F-150 she drove to Nashville almost 30 years ago and is now working on during quarantine.**

and continuing to create a supportive environment for us to work and rest. As for my local team, they are warriors. Each is dealing with their own level of chaos and grief, and yet they bring their all every day for the good of our artists. They are wildly creative, incredibly strong and kind to each other.

Two things I've learned about myself: I'm woefully unaware of the struggles for people of color. Below the surface of what I think I know and understand, there is so much to absorb, digest, act on and make right. And we often say decisions we make in the music industry aren't life or death, but now some of them are. That forces all of us to be decisive and unwavering in our beliefs, despite societal pressures. The bottom line is no longer the bottom line anymore. I've learned that I have very little tolerance for actions to the contrary.

**12 GEORGE BRINER**

**Valory President**

Music has proven time and again to be important to people and helps all of us navigate through difficult times. This team is more driven and self-motivated than I previously assumed. Plus, they still have a sense of humor and love a good, strong cocktail. And I learned that once I retire, I have a good chance to apply for a Santa Claus mall gig (see photo).



**15 SHANE ALLEN**  
Columbia SVP/Promotion

Change is clearly more of a constant than ever before, and you absolutely have to be open to new ways of doing things – not just different than last year or last month, but different than last week, yesterday or even a few hours ago.

The Columbia staff has done a fantastic job of adapting to change and being self-motivated.

Without the ability to travel, they've refreshed their approaches based on the needs of each week since we've been out of the office, and they're constantly coming up with new and creative ways to draw attention to our incredible artists and their music.

I've learned I need some sort of movement and change of scenery each day, so getting outside or taking a drive to make calls has become a constant.



Allen (l) spends time on the water with family.

**16 BOBBY YOUNG**  
Capitol VP/Promotion

I've learned music is essential, and country fans will find a way to it – even during a pandemic – as they would anything that brings them joy. I already knew but have been reminded I'm blessed to work with rockstars! Everyone on the Capitol staff and the Universal staff has proven they can adapt to any situation. I'm proud of everyone on this team for not missing a beat and not wavering in their belief in our artists and their music.

For me, I've learned I need structure in my life to work out of my home. I feel guilty if I'm not working every minute of the day, because I now live in my office. I pray for our artists' singles regularly and believe God wants us to. I also thank God every day that I'm married to a very special person. Heather understands the business and also has no problem reminding me it's time to turn it off for a couple hours, take a shower occasionally and change my clothes.

**17 GATOR HARRISON**  
iHeartCountry Brand. Coord.

iHeartMedia/Nashville SVP/Programming

I've learned our business is vital. Lifesaving. Needed. From breaking news, weather warnings and tornado recovery to credible information during a global pandemic, or simply playing a new song that encourages, affects and challenges you, radio is still that informed, caring friend who's there when you need one most.

I've learned our Big 98 family has incredible strength, resilience, creativity and heart. Strength and resilience in working from makeshift home studios. Creativity to entertain daily and virtually with The Big 98 Under Cover Artist Performances, Virtual Guitar-B-Que with Brad Paisley, Jake Owen Homemade Prom, Teacher's Aid and more. No excuses, instead viewing this moment as an opportunity to connect with Nashville on a deeper level.



Harrison and daughter Ezra enjoy extra time together each day.

What I've learned most about myself is that I needed someone to hit pause for me. My heart breaks for the lives lost and affected by COVID-19 – physically, mentally, emotionally and economically. But it's been a wonderful reminder for me to slow down and put greater investment and emphasis on the things that really matter in my life. Working from home has given me more time with God, my family and friends. Slowing down in this moment has actually made

me healthier spiritually, mentally and physically, and made me even more productive and creative.

**18 TOM MARTENS**  
VP/Radio & Streaming

Radio is seeking comfort in both food and music in 2020. We have a pretty resilient bunch here at Warner. While our productivity hasn't really suffered, everyone is eager to get back on the road. For me, *Tiger King* seemed like a good idea at the time. And I grow a pretty awesome quarantine beard!



**19 GREGG SWEDBERG**  
iHeartCountry Brand Coord.

Minneapolis SVP/Programming, KEEY/Minneapolis PD

It's been eye-opening how radio is still so important in people's eyes and lives. Between COVID-19 and the unrest in Minneapolis, our listeners have been seeking information, entertainment and companionship. It's also been great to be part of the iHeartCountry team, who have been so generous about sharing ideas and information. It's a phenomenal group of top-shelf people, who along with our National Programming team, are continuing to evolve Country radio. My local staff has been so hard-working, so involved with our community.

And I need to be around people. I actually enjoy Zoom and Teams calls. Now that I'm back in the office a few days a week, I am happy to take meetings, even if they're socially distanced. I'm from Minnesota; I think we invented social distancing.



**20 JOHN MARKS**  
Spotify Head of Country Music

Things I've re-learned:

1. "What, me worry?" – Alfred E. Neuman, *Mad* magazine
2. "My glass is always half full." – Optimist's credo
3. "Every day is once in a lifetime." – Mac McAnally/Drake White

**21 LESLIE FRAM**  
CMT SVP/Music Strategy & Talent

This pandemic not only shut down touring, but production for TV originals. We've had to reimagine creative for producing specials. CMT has produced two music specials since the pandemic – Artists Of The Year honoring heroes around the country and CMT Giants Kenny Rogers. We're in the middle of producing the *CMT Music Awards*, which airs Oct. 14. Fortunately, we have

**13 CRAIG WISEMAN**  
Big Loud Owner/Managing Partner

I learned how much the business is in my DNA. This has really made me appreciate how much I love everything about Nashville – driving down the Row every day and my building full of staff, all of them friends, and the feel of them busy in their offices as I'm busy in mine. I love co-writers sitting across from me, going to shows with the Big Loud gang and having them drag me to the damn Red Door afterward for "just one more." This whole three-ring circus is a damn blessing, and I will never take it for granted. God bless Music Row.

I've learned amazing and hard-working is not an address, it's a personality type. The Big Louders have risen to the changes and challenges and never lowered their goals or expectations. I was always proud of them; now I'm kind of in awe.

I've learned to be more appreciative. I had a couple of No. 1s during lockdown, and a special one was "Chasin' You." All Big Loud. Morgan Wallen, Jamie Moore and I wrote it, Joey Moi produced with those stellar musicians and Morgan did *so* great performing it. Then our amazing promotion and marketing team joined in ... all of them focused and driven. You realize how many other world-class talents it takes beyond the obvious creators to reach No. 1. My appreciation goes back all the way to my first chart-topper in 1994 and all the work that when into all of them since. The music industry at its finest. I'm very blessed to have a front row seat.

The coolest thing about COVID-19? Definitely the hair. I call mine "The Amadeus."



**14 MIKE CURB**  
Curb Word Entertainment Owner/Chairman

I've learned that we have to work twice as hard, because our goal during COVID-19 is for all of our 150 people to stay with the company and to make sure



we continue to have major hit records with our key artists. We've done that this year with For King & Country ("Together") and Lee Brice's hit with Carly Pearce as well as "One Of Them Girls." We also took Lee's No. 1 "Rumor" and spread it over to Pop AC with a significantly long run. We've also had a No. 1 record with Big Daddy Weave, and we're building current singles by Dylan Scott, Mo Pitney, Filmore, Tim Dugger, Jackson Michelson, Francesca

Battistelli, We Are Messengers, Natalie Grant, Sidewalk Prophets, Love & The Outcome, Wyn Starks, Jay-Way and Steven Malcolm & Shaggy.

**15 BEN VAUGHN**  
Warner/Chappell President/CEO

I've learned how fortunate we all are to all be in the community of Nashville – you can tell the bonds of relationship are strong because of how jarring it is to be physically separated from colleagues and the longing to get back to the community aspect of our jobs.

For my team, flexibility is the key as people learn and evolve their skills to meet whatever problem needs to be solved (virtually) that day.

And I have really enjoyed remembering how and then teaching my 10-year-old son how to make paper ninja throwing stars.



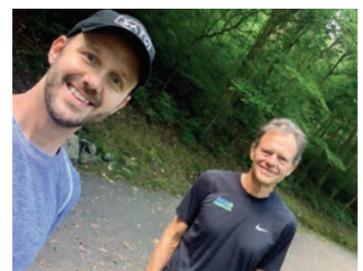
**16 CLARENCE SPALDING**  
Maverick Management President

While we all knew the business was heavily dependent on touring, we didn't realize you could make literally pennies on Zoom shows. My team has ability – without touring – to expand the brands of our artists. Also, on the Zoom calls, they look like they are living the good life. And I hate working in an office by myself. Fucking hate it.

Spalding enjoys time away from travel to spend with his grandchildren.

**17 RUSTY GASTON**  
Sony/ATV Music Publishing CEO

My top three lessons: Great songs can survive anything. You can't squash creativity. Fans gravitate toward country music in times of uncertainty, because it's good for the soul. This team is exceptional, resilient and adaptable. They will go to any length to help songwriters and get their art into the right hands. For me, maintaining a strong faith in God, songwriters and the power of music is more important than ever.



Gaston (l) enjoys a socially distanced hike with Tom Douglas.

**18 SETH ENGLAND**  
Big Loud Partner/CEO

So many things I didn't see coming. The first few weeks of COVID-19, our staff kind of stared at each other with a "What do we do now?" look. That might be a way of saying we were being a bit lazy on so many other artists discovery drivers, because our genre tours so much more. Silver lining: we engaged and learned how to break artists without live performance. What I am most excited about is not letting go of all these new tactics when touring comes back. It makes me think we can break artists so much faster than before, and in many cases before they even hit the road.

The Big Loud team is resilient with incredible, mentally tough executives. I am so proud of how we have hired. We have an amazing, collaborative culture paired with an executive team that cannot stand losing. There have



Fram (c) gathers with CMT staffers pre-quarantine.

great producers like Margaret Comeaux, who leads our production team, and John Hamlin and the best talent in the nation to work with. We've learned that the CMT Team works as a family; everyone steps in to help each other out. And I've learned I can embrace change as life changes. It's important to be kind to ourselves and take a moment to breath, reflect and be grateful for what we have.

**22 KRIS LAMB**  
Big Machine SVP/Promotion & Digital

Outside of the data analytics, the big philosophical takeaway has been the affirmation that every problem has a solution. Regardless of how challenging the conditions may be, there is a path to the desired destination. You have to be open to new ideas and strategies, open to being wrong and remain persistent at all costs.

Watching not only our core promo team, but the entire label group, evolve and adapt in this challenging environment while executing at an even higher level than pre-COVID is beyond inspiring. Life priorities shift, and I've watched my colleagues balance family and personal struggles with the grace I can only hope to one day obtain. We are truly an incredible Big Machine bonded by passion and determination.

I've also learned how to (better) take care of myself. I've learned the importance of investing in personal and professional relationships, physical and mental health, and pausing every once in a while to respect and appreciate the beauty in life. Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."



Blythe (l) gets an assist from daughter Frankie during a music call.

**23 STACY BLYTHE**  
Big Loud VP/Promotion

I already knew how blessed we are in this business, but COVID-19 has driven that lesson home. We've taken care of our own through highs and lows, and those who are sources of positive energy will keep us afloat. The cool thing is we have all taken turns lifting each other up as we navigate times of gratitude and uncertainty.

The Big Loud team has always been resilient, and I've watched them move forward with so much creativity and fresh thinking. The work from home situation has

definitely upped the level of empathy for those working in the field. We have implemented some communication practices I would love to see carried over, as our team feels more in sync than ever. We love a good Zoom game night.

Two things I've learned about myself: I do, in fact, like gin ... and a few months at home with my family is really good for my soul.

**24 LEE ADAMS**  
Broken Bow VP/Promotion

BMG has made it clear our safety and well-being come first, allowing us to focus on our jobs and redefine how we do business. The team's resiliency is inspiring, and creativity has been key. The financial toll on our radio partners and artists is heartbreaking, but the optimism our artists show encourages us to work that much harder. While I seem to be a natural with social distancing, I miss my BBRMG family, radio friends and seeing our artists bring the music to life.



**25 LAUREN THOMAS**  
Sony/Nashville VP/National Promotion



Change is consistent, so adaptability is crucial. Innovation has been top-of-mind for the Sony crew. From live shows to live streams, providing station winners "dinner and a show," working multiple songs on the chart from the same artist with limited ramp-up, audio/video content driving increased traffic to our prep site, setting up a virtual promo tour with new technology – this team has shown real creativity and flexibility. Outside the importance of a mute button on video calls, I've learned how to do simple, silly stuff like French-braid my hair as a 35-year-old woman. And I am strangely proud of it.

been some tough weeks, no doubt – for me as well. Those weeks, Austen, Patch, Stacy and Candice stepped up. Vice versa when they were having a down week. I feel covered by my team, and I hope they feel the same in return from me.

Personally, I'm a mover. I like having many fun and exciting tasks in front of me and *love* employee interaction. My girlfriend will tell you, the first few weeks of quarantine I was possibly a different person – completely off my game and worried a lot. I just woke up one day and decided this containment wasn't going to prevent me from "moving" and filling those gaps of employee engagement in new ways. I'm not sure she'll ever think I am totally normal, but I hear I'm back to my old self.

**19 ALLISON JONES**  
BMLG SVP/A&R



In the most challenging time ever to break a new artist, those who've experienced success have been the most creative and relentless in trying to build a fan base and audience. Avenue Beat is one, blowing up on TikTok overnight, but that was after months of recording, creating new content, doing live virtual performances and responding to every fan comment and message on every platform. Super stars and established artists have been able to cut through the noise a bit easier, primarily because core fans want musical comfort food.

We've had more artists recording and releasing more and better music than ever, and my badass team has not missed a beat or a deadline. I already knew, but quarantine has proved how fearless and dedicated they are to our artists and label. They're my

family, and I miss seeing them every day!

I'm a social butterfly and need people. I desperately miss traveling, live music, summer tours, entertaining, going worry-free to restaurants and bars and, believe it or not, I miss in-person meetings. I'm not a big fan of Zoom and having to look at myself all day. That made me really miss my dermatologist and hair stylist – my first two visits when things opened!

**20 KEN ROBOLD**  
Sony/Nashville EVP/COO

**21 JIMMY HARNEN**  
BMLG Records President/CEO

Having the experience of working remotely as a regional at the start of my career, the transition was not a big stretch. We are having a lot of video meetings, which have been, surprisingly, highly effective. That said, not having all of our tent pole events earlier in the year – *ACM Awards*, *CMA Music Fest* and the *CMT Music Awards* – has taken away our superchargers. The biggest impact, obviously, has been touring. Our imprint was looking forward to several big tours with our artists this year, all of which were postponed. On a personal level, working from home has given me more time to spend with my family, although I'm pretty certain my wife won't be too sad when we return to the office.



Harnen (r) and wife Lynn mask up for safe travels.

**22 ASHLEY GORLEY**  
Songwriter/Tape Room Music Founder

I've learned my team doesn't need to come to an office to get work done. They stay motivated regardless of circumstances, because their love of music guides them. They care about our writers' well beings, not just their talents. And, they are willing to listen to me ramble and brainstorm at any hour of the day!

As to the business, our community is resilient, creative and determined. Throughout quarantine, I have seen writers and artists step up, work harder and write better than ever. Artist development never ends, and it's been cool to see artists in all stages of their careers push themselves to the next level creatively and deliver the best music to their fans.



**23 BRIAN WRIGHT**  
UMG/Nashville EVP/A&R

What I've learned about my team is I need them *way* more than they need me. They have been absolutely amazing!

**24 CORAN CAPSHAW**  
Red Light Management Founder/CEO

I'm really proud of how our team has come together and been creative about releasing and marketing music. We're particularly proud as a company that in the first 33 weeks of the year, our artists have had 16 No. 1 Country singles for a combined 19 weeks at the top.



Rich (r) and son Connor make the most of a long summer together.

**25 KELLY RICH**  
Amazon Sr. Mgr./Label Relations

In terms of the business, I've learned how creative we can be and how necessary it is to be able to adapt and move quickly. Switching events from in-person to virtual and hosting livestreams across channels to out-of-home campaigns, we are continuing to go big with our support of artists. With the Amazon team, I've learned the increasing importance of communication and how we are there for one another when it's needed the most. For myself, I've learned how much I enjoy spending more time with my husband and kids.

**26 MATTHEW HARGIS**  
BMLG Records  
SVP/Promotion

This year has been a great reminder of how universal, unifying and healing music is, and how lucky we are to be a part of something people seek out in these times. Our team and company are the best – adaptable, resilient and possessed with great intuition on how to meet the needs of our artists, clients, customers and consumers. Not having the opportunity to see our artists and their music connect with fans



on a weekly basis in a concert setting is something I never took for granted, but the anticipation of that first show is what fuels me every day.



Hargis uses spin counts to supplement homeschool math classes for his daughters.

**27 JOHN FOX**  
Entercom  
WNSH/New York PD

The chart moves even slower during a pandemic, and staff meetings should be scheduled in listen-only mode and after 2pm.

**28 MARCI BRAUN**  
Entercom WUSN  
Chicago APD/MD

My team is phenomenal. They're always asking what they can do to help. They're working more and doing it with a smile. At least, I think there's a smile. Since I can't see them every day, I'm not so sure, but hope springs eternal. I've learned I like wearing a t-shirt and running shorts all day, every day. Not to go running in, just to wear because they're super comfortable. I don't miss putting on makeup or doing my hair. I also enjoy the commute from my bed to the desk. Better than taking the El downtown every day!



**29 ASHLEY SIDOTI**  
Valory VP/Promotion & Digital

Watching live entertainment come to a halt has been heartbreaking. Labels are fortunate fans are still consuming music, and I have enjoyed the added challenge of finding new ways to expose artists and music. People will always want music and the comfort that it brings. For that, I am thankful.



Nothing is getting easier in our world, but I applaud my team because they show up every day eager to win. When one of us has a rough moment or a rough day, we pick each other up. I'm very proud of our sense of family that has only strengthened in this time.

Working from home has made it harder to shut down and be present; I need better balance. I'm not making

huge strides, but we have started some new routines as a family that I am really enjoying. Life is not perfect at the moment, working full-time from home with a toddler. It takes teamwork and a lot of grace.

**30 KEVIN CALLAHAN**  
Entercom San Diego/  
Riverside OM/Brand Management

Radio has continued relevance in the lives of people and in the community – information, escape and, frankly, they were looking to us to provide hope in uncertain times. We proved to be innovative in the face of the unknown and showed the ability to create quality content from every room in the house and the backyard.

Collaboration has made the KSON and KFRG teams a stronger unit. Talent and collective brain power have overcome challenges and created ideas to engage the audience. We've learned from and comforted one another and even created a mantra. If you hear one of us say "PTFO," it essentially means "Rub some dirt on it and press on. Be resilient, we have your back!"

I have learned how much I miss face-to-face conversations with people. Video conferences are poor replacements, though I feel blessed to have those tools as it would be even worse without them. I've also learned having the refrigerator close to my workspace is a real problem. Luckily, I am also learning new ways to solve problems.



**31 SHARI ROTH**  
Warner/WEA Dir./  
National Radio & Streaming  
Promotion

The country music business is continuing to do what it does best: entertaining and inspiring our loyal listeners. Since I was a regional until July, I have a unique perspective of my team. They have not missed a beat! We have always closely collaborated and supported each other when trying to get airplay, but the current climate has made us even more creative. All I am doing right now is learning. Zoom has been the main way to connect programmers and artists, and even though these have been incredibly successful, I have really missed



traveling. Until that is possible, I am so grateful to be working with a fabulous team and our amazing artists to bring great music to the masses. Please stay safe and strong!

**26 CLINT HIGHAM**  
Morris Higham President

We may not all be in the same boat, but we are all in the same ocean. Patience, patience, patience – something I've never been good at. As a personal manager, a large portion of our income is driven by live shows and, of course, that's been flattened. It's also forced radio playlists to become much more conservative, so breaking new acts has become much more challenging. And creative people are having to create mostly online, which just isn't the same as the human connection.

I've been team-driven for a long time, and they have really stepped up. We have not laid off any employees nor cut any wages ... they're truly my family. I go to bed every night thinking about them and how to keep our culture the best it can be. Meanwhile, artists are feeling very caged, as they're unable to feel the connection and energy they're used to.

I'm learning I can't control everything. Trusting in my faith has been my saving grace, as I've definitely had my share of dark days. But I'm doing my best to lean on the blessings and all of the great years in the past, knowing we will all be back again. Some people may not realize the "suits" on the other side of the microphone also feed off that energy exchange between fans and artists. We're all missing that.

**27 BRITTANY SCHAFFER**  
Spotify Head/Nashville Artist & Label Services

This has highlighted the continuing growth and popularity of streaming among the country audience, who can connect wherever they choose – phones, computers, smart speakers and TVs. My hope is listening habits created this year will continue once the pandemic is over.



Schaffer shows off her favorite addition to 2020, her daughter Scarlett.

The incredible passion that my team has for the Nashville music community has really shown through. I've been amazed watching their energy and creativity in support of artists continuing to connect with fans on-platform and in social campaigns, or helping raise money for the Music Health Alliance and MusiCares COVID Relief Funds.

I've learned I love and miss in-person interactions and live shows but appreciate finding a little more balance and time with my family and for myself. Having more balance has actually reinvigorated my love of music and made me more creative and efficient, so I hope I'll be able to carry some of that balance with me into the future.

**28 JASON OWEN**  
Sandbox Entertainment President/CEO  
Monument Records Co-President

We all should have invested in Zoom stock. I have the best team in the business. They have stepped up to a level that has far exceeded my greatest expectations. And, I drink too much.



**29 JIM CATINO**  
Sony/Nashville  
EVP/A&R

We have an extremely innovative group here at Sony. It's amazing to see the trust that's been built as we work remotely. We lean into uncharted territory each day and haven't missed a beat while growing closer as a team – not only from the challenges of the pandemic but all the civil unrest. Our proudest moment as a company was the day Randy Goodman helped put

together during Blackout Tuesday. We had eye-opening virtual discussions with amazing community leaders, artists and influencers – a day I will never forget. Patience and staying focused are what will get us through.

**30 BRIAN O'CONNELL**  
Live Nation  
President/Country

As an industry, we are extremely resilient. We have seen the leaders really lead, and we will all come back from this stronger, more grateful and more creative than ever. I have missed seeing my team in person. And I've gained some self-discipline in setting goals, hitting them, then raising the bar. Cutting out the noise. All things that have a tendency to slack when you are running 100mph every day. I've been really digging into what got me here, and that was my love of music. I have been listening a lot and understanding it's my passion for the art that makes me who I am.



**31 GEORGE COURI**  
Triple 8 Management  
Partner

People in the business are much happier to see my face without having to be physically near my face. My team works just as well, if not better, in their pajamas. And, at this point, I've learned all the things that can be learned about me. Frankly, I'm quite sick of myself.



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