

LABEL GROUP OF THE YEAR

A year of transition that saw Sony Music Nashville consolidate its Columbia and BNA imprints under one promotion staff was also a year of dominance. The company's collective radio efforts netted a remarkable 24.2% share of radio airplay during the chart year (Nov. 14, 2010 to Nov. 12, 2011), earning Sony/Nashville Country Aircheck's inaugural Label Group of the Year honor. Led by the Nos. 2 and 3 labels Arista (9.4%) and RCA (7.5%), and solid contributions from BNA (4.7%) and Columbia (2.6%), Sony took the crown by a healthy margin (see sidebar). Country Aircheck asked Chairman & CEO Gary Overton and SVP/Promotion Skip Bishop for their thoughts on the achievement:

CA: What does earning Label Group of the Year mean to you?

Gary Overton: It's a tremendous accomplishment, especially against stiff competition from the other labels. And to earn this honor in a year that included significant changes at Sony Music Nashville is a testament to the renewed focus, discipline and character of our radio promotion staffs. But even they could not have achieved this high level of success without the great music of our Sony Music artists and our relationships with our friends and partners at Country radio. I am so proud of our entire SMN staff as we share this honor with them, as well. They are the best.

Skip Bishop: Maintaining the largest chart share, as Sony has for years, is an extremely important goal on many levels, but not on the numerical interpretation as much as what it truly represents. It simply means that our artists and their music continue to be at the top of their game and that radio comes to us first for assurance that the singles will be big hits. If my math is correct, one out of every four singles played this year on Country radio was a Sony Nashville artist. Maintaining those numbers only continues to create the confidence in radio's partnerships with our staffs.

How are the three promotion teams distinct from each other? What do they each do well and what personalities do they have as units?

SB: They are, without a doubt, the very best teams in Nashville, and the numbers support that. Our competitors continually approach our people and get shooed away. Gary has a hard rule that we hire the best people and then let them do their jobs. The three teams are as different and separate as possible, and also very much alike. The common denominators are creativity, tenacity, loyalty and an unmatched sense of competition. They see every day as the last two minutes of the Super Bowl.

The reemergence of RCA as a heritage, top-tier label has been fascinating to watch. Keith Gale and his team have shown a remarkable level of focus and the implementation of pure artist development. Chris Young and his four back-to-back No.

1 singles are not the product of overnight success. Chris, Keith and RCA's promo staff have moved as one family unit to never waiver on the path to the top. The same intensity is happening now with Jake Owen, who has delivered time and again to now be breaking into the top level of radio's automatics. And it was earned through consistently great music and unwavering promotional focus.

The Arista promo team is like a kaleidoscope of creativity and energy. Lesly Tyson has her hands filled like a PD with seven highly rated morning shows – you walk down the hall and get smarter from the contact high! Between Ryan Dokke's knowledge of radio; Tyler Waugh's vision of people's habits, consumer trends and social networking; Chris Waters' pure, unbridled talent; Lauren Thomas's energy; and John Sigler as possibly the most unique and greatest living promo person on Earth (and crazy as a late June catfish), the Arista team is unstoppable.

The Columbia/BNA staff has just been ignited by the leadership of Norbert Nix. He's stepped in and implemented bold, innovative ideas. He's gathered that team together into a fierce pack of warriors. Norbert has outstanding vision to reach new levels for Kenny Chesney and methodical strategies for breaking their deep roster of new artists.

Looking back, what are your biggest triumphs?

GO: Obviously, being awarded Country Aircheck Label Group of the Year is huge, and we've been blessed with so many victories this year: Four No. 1s in a row with Chris Young. Jake Owen's first No. 1.

SB: Watching RCA go from No. 12 to No. 3 in chart share in only 12 months and taking Sara Evans back to the top with "Stronger." Re-releasing Chris Young's "Voices," which originally peaked at 37 and "wouldn't test," then 18 months later became a massive chart-topper with sales and research to

back it up. Same single, no edit, same song, no remix ... just never saying never from the RCA promo machine.

GO: Four No. 1s with Kenny Chesney on his current platinum album ... and "Reality" will be a No. 1.

SB: Kenny is such a great partner and always sees a higher level to achieve without losing an inch of ground with his early adopters.

GO: Seeing our superstars Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood, who have become country music ambassadors, hosting the highly-rated *CMA Awards* telecast for the fourth time.

SB: It was remarkable to see Brad have his 20th No. 1, putting him in the top level of achievers in Country music history.

GO: Miranda Lambert becoming a superstar with multiple No. 1s, four No. 1 albums in a row, a No. 1 debut album with her friends the Pistol Annies, CMA, ACM and Grammy awards, and a highly successful headlining tour.

SB: Seeing media insanity over Ronnie's Dunn's masterpiece single "Cost Of Living." He did interviews with everyone from CNN to ABC News. The song is slowly finding its way in music history as a song that touched the American heart.

GO: I would venture that our biggest triumph, being a record label, has been consistently achieving our goal of at least doubling the first-week album sales of our artists vs. their prior album. In this marketplace, that is *huge*.

What was the biggest disappointment?

SB: In promotion, there were no disappointments. That only happens when you give up on something. As we've proven, if we know the music is there, we'll keep bringing it back until it fits. Sometimes a first dance is only a first dance. Singles are like children, they need time to grow and develop. And they will always surprise you if you keep believing in them and their good qualities.

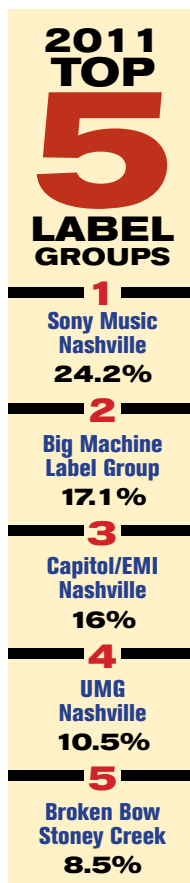
GO: Kenny not being a final nominee for CMA Entertainer of the Year. By any standard, he more than deserved it.

What does this accomplishment say about SMN's relationship to and commitment to Country radio?

SB: It's not about the number or the size of the pie slice. It's the goal we achieve to know that we're doing our job. To gain radio's trust to have one of every four singles played is an honor and a responsibility. It's the numerical proof that our music is working.

GO: It says we value our great, longstanding relationships with our friends at Country radio. They are always top-of-mind and will always be a priority for us.

CAC



Bling Quintet: Sony/Nashville's promotion brain trust (l-r) are Norbert Nix, Gary Overton, Keith Gale, Lesly Tyson and Skip Bishop.

