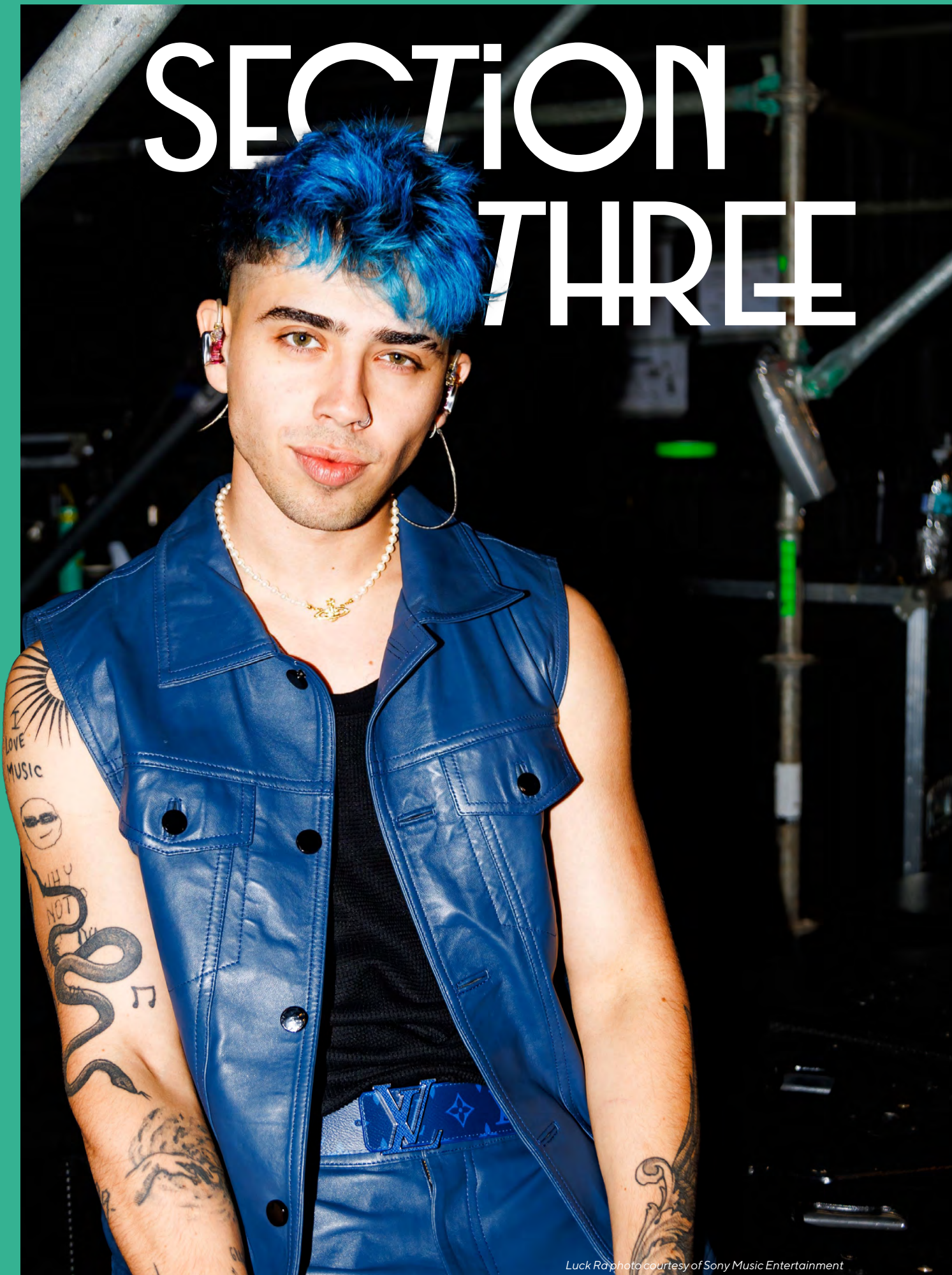


SECTION THREE



Luck Ra photo courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment

RECORD LABELS ARE POWERING GLOBAL CULTURES & ECONOMIES

The positive impact the work and investment of record labels has on both cultural and economic development is often seen most clearly in parts of the world with more rapidly evolving music markets.

Their long-term commitment and investment - not just in local artists but also in the teams of people on the ground that work and support them - are key to driving music's growth. Beyond the immediate artists' teams is the broadening music ecosystem of people working both within and beyond the label structure that are developing skills and expertise to support an artist's journey.

This localised support and investment takes place around the world, connecting artists to a global network of local experts who support and promote their work.

Explore the stories:

► **Bridging continents, amplifying voices**

► **More music from more places**

► **The rise of Lars Huang**



CASE STUDY

Bridging continents, amplifying voices



India x Canada | Warner Music Group

The idea for 91 North Records started in the depths of lockdown when Jay Mehta, Managing Director, Warner Music India and SAARC, had just joined the company. With the ambition to “make the Indian sound global,” Mehta discovered that Canada was becoming a music centre for both creators and fans.

“In 2020 we were discussing that Indian music had this chance to create the next big wave. And while we were discussing that, Canada started becoming the hotbed for great Indian content, with a lot of Punjabi artists,” he said. “While it was already a big consumption market, Canada was newly becoming a big creator market, which

was consistently making great Indian sounds.”

That was a lightbulb moment for Mehta to create 91 North Records, which aims to promote the explosive growth in South Asian music.

Kristen Burke, President of Warner Music Canada, explains there was huge excitement in the Canadian market.

“For us at Warner Music Canada, we’ve recognised that it is not only about South Asian music, but that Canada is just so diverse and so multicultural. So, leaning into that is something that we are really focusing on,” she said.

The joint venture between Warner Music Canada and Warner Music India launched in August 2022 in Toronto and looks to combine the market potential of two distinct fan bases to bring this music to a global stage.

And Warner Music sees 91 North Records as a vital bridge between East and West, uniting talent, cultures, and ideas.

The label name brings together both countries with India’s country code (91 for phone calls) and Canada’s geographical location.

Canadian-based Punjabi musician Jonita Gandhi was amongst the first artists to sign with 91 North Records, while the Canadian and Indian teams have separately worked closely on the development of Karan Aujla.

The global network allows Warner Music to amplify artists through global support from A&R, marketing, and distribution, identifying culturally impactful collaborations and more.

“Jay and I quickly got together and recognised that there was a real opportunity here to be the first label to come together to really support these artists, because there really was no infrastructure to do that at the time in Canada. The music and the art are just so incredible, and we really felt like we needed to help elevate them and put them on a global stage. I think from minute one we were just aligned and saw that vision,” Burke said.



For us at Warner Music Canada, we’ve recognised that it is not only about South Asian music, but that Canada is just so diverse and so multicultural. So, leaning into that is something that we are really focusing on.”

KRISTEN BURKE
PRESIDENT, WARNER
MUSIC CANADA

Mehta added: “91 North Records is more than just a record label; it’s a cultural movement that we wanted to create an infrastructure for. We’re not just exporting music, we’re exporting a culture, an energy, a way of life, so we’re not looking at just the recording side of an artist’s business. We’re looking at the publishing business, the live business, we’re looking at building big brand deals. And a key part of this, to get it right, has been building out the Canadian team to support these artists.”

Burke continued: “We’ve added team members who are of South Asian heritage because we know it’s really important to be able to speak to an artist in their language and to understand their culture and the different nuances.”

“We didn’t feel like this was something that we could just do on our own from Canada. And understanding that even though there are artists that are based in Canada, the number one market was still India.”

91 North is guided by artist and producer Ikky, who has worked with artists including Diljit Dosanjh, Sidhu Moose Wala.

And with the merging forces of India and Canada, there has also been the sharing of expertise.

Part of this has been hiring two A&R specialists in South Asian music who are on the ground.

“We’re not looking to try and westernise these artists. We’re trying to support them and help them become global superstars and not make them feel like they need to change or do something like sing in English to get those bigger looks,” Burke explains. “As the world is changing and sounds are travelling, we’re making incredible music that cuts through – that’s what we want to do.”

91 North signs both Indian artists who are living in India, as well as artists who are of Indian heritage and living in Canada.

And there are plans to expand this beyond just Canada and India.

The team have been strategically looking at whether to expand this venture in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, which all have significant South Asian diasporas.



91 North Records is more than just a record label; it’s a cultural movement that we wanted to create an infrastructure for. We’re not just exporting music, we’re exporting a culture, an energy, a way of life...”

JAY MEHTA
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
WARNER MUSIC INDIA
AND SAARC

Mehta said: “It comes down to a lot of data. With access to data from streaming, from YouTube, Spotify and others, we’re able to see not just which countries, but where within these countries are the hotbeds of fans. So, we know the UK is a massive market, but now Australia and New Zealand have come up in a big way and this is reflected in terms of streaming numbers.”

Burke added: “We are looking at those markets that have a bigger diaspora and where there are artists where it’s really resonating.”

CASE STUDY

More music from more places

 Nigeria | Universal Music Group

There are great artists in every corner of the globe, but not every great artist is seen on the world stage. Record labels help support artists and genres in emerging music markets around the world by investing in local artists and providing them with resources they need to succeed not only in their domestic region and market, but around the world.

For example, in 2024 Universal Music Group invested in Mavin Global Records, a leading Nigerian Afrobeats label which is led by founder (and renowned artist and producer) Michael Collins Ajereh Jazzy (aka Don Jazzy) and his Chief Operating Officer, Tega Oghenejobo. The combination of UMG's resources and global expertise with Mavin's

knowledge of the local market and artists has turbocharged the label's success and positioned its artists for success throughout their region and beyond.

Mavin founder and CEO, Don Jazzy, says of establishing the partnership: "Africa's music scene is incredibly diverse – and we're only at the very beginning of the journey of it finding its global voice.

We know that it's growing and it's having a really exciting moment but there's still so much more room to grow. Tapping into the experience and scale that Universal Music Group can offer to us and our artists felt like a natural next step."

Oghenejobo continues: "For us, it's about cross-education between ourselves and Universal Music Group. We understand the uniqueness of our business and our artists, and we have 13-years' experience of working within the Nigerian and broader African music business. But with Universal Music Group, we plug into a bigger global machine with all the operation systems and expertise in places around the world to which we previously had no access.

"Mutual trust sits at the heart of our partnership. Universal Music Group trusts in the legacy that we have built – and we have full trust in them to protect and amplify our artists worldwide," he concludes.

Building on the theme, Devraj Sanyal, Universal Music Group's SVP Strategy, AMEA, says of expanding local labels: "It must happen steadily and sequentially. Investments by global players in a consistent fashion, being in sync with the societies and bodies that represent the collective, and a deep and meaningful bond with the local governments are absolutely critical for sustainable long-term growth."

Sanyal, who also serves as Chairman and CEO of Universal Music India, has seen firsthand what global opportunities do for artists in rapidly evolving markets. But that doesn't mean it's easy or without challenges.

For example, while India is the most populated country in the world, it ranks as the world's 15th largest recorded music market by annual revenues.

Still, Sanyal is bullish on India. With the quality of UMG's people, resources and vision, Sanyal states: "A song called *Big Dawgs* by a south Asian artist called hanumankind managed to enter the global charts and become the most streamed song of the digital era ever. This has opened the doors for India to the world and put so much faith in the market. India has so much promise: domestic music for the domestic market, domestic music for the global diaspora, and finally, domestic music for the world."



Sanyal notes that in emerging markets, government support is critical for successful development of the market and artists' success: "Government support for creators of all kinds is critical. The power to get everyone to respect copyright lies most in their hands and we are working with them very closely to communicate and enforce this."

Speaking to the African market, Oghenejobo agrees: "In Africa we need governments to help with enforcement and stopping illegal services offering music to people for free. We want our music fans to be listening to music through legitimate and licensed services. It's the only way African music can continue to grow in a sustainable way."

So far, the partnership is already achieving incredible success, combining their expertise and resources to bring Nigerian artists onto the world stage in a way previously unseen.

Great examples of this come by way of their work with young Nigerian artists Rema and Aya Starr – both of whom started with local followings that are now reaching audiences further and further afield. Aya Starr's *The Year I Turned 21* broke the record for the biggest first day album debut by a Nigerian female artist in Spotify history and ended the year as the most streamed Nigerian Project of 2024. Rema has also broken records across the board with his album *HEIS* peaking at #1 in over 11 countries and debuting at #7 on the Billboard World Album chart.

Universal Music Group's investment in Nigeria through their partnership with Mavin has positive implications for the local industry, even beyond the label and their artists. The investment goes towards developing local executives, building local infrastructure and encourages other big musical platforms to also invest in the region.

As Oghenejobo continues: "With Universal Music Group working alongside us, we're able to work towards putting the building blocks in place to ensure Nigeria has a prosperous musical future. They're a bridge for us, and they accelerate all the hard work that our team are putting in.

"Our partnership has set the wheels in motion of bringing Nigerian – and indeed African – creativity to the fore.

"We are developing programmes for local songwriters and we're investing in executive training programmes to broaden the employee pool in the country. All to make sure we can grow globally, but also so we can retain art and culture on the continent as well."

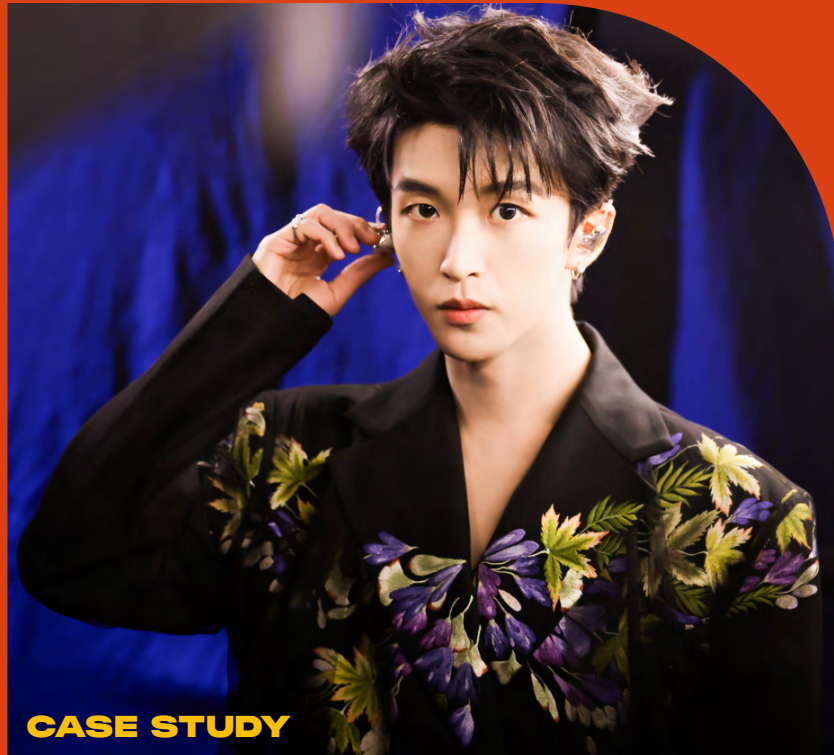


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TEGA OGHENEJOBO
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
MAVIN GLOBAL



Bayanni photo by BUCHWITHTHELENS



CASE STUDY

The rise of Lars Huang



China | Sony Music Entertainment

Lars Huang has emerged as one of the most exciting Gen Z talents coming out of China. After being discovered on the Hunan TV bel canto variety show *The Voice of China*, the 25-year-old has gone from strength to strength, with a flood of live shows now under his belt.

In 2024 alone, Huang performed at 29 music festivals and wowed fans with his magnetic stage presence and passion.

Andrew Chan, Chief Executive Officer of Sony Music Entertainment China, has been working closely with the rising star since the release of his first 2023 track, *Grow Up*.

As Chan explains: "What truly excites us about Lars is his unwavering passion and dedication. He's got that spark, that hunger to be the best, which is exactly

the kind of talent we love to champion in this vibrant and competitive region. Yet, Lars's 'fighting spirit' isn't just about competition; it's about a deep-seated desire to connect with his audience and create something truly special. He is an artist who thrives in a market as dynamic and demanding as this one."

A major part of Lars's approach has been to experiment with his music and styles. The Mandopop artist sings in Mandarin, English and Cantonese – and adapts to local styles and genres.

"The contemporary Chinese music landscape, much like its global counterparts, thrives on diversity. Audiences are increasingly sophisticated, embracing a spectrum of genres from hip-hop and EDM to R&B and pop. Our strategy is to cultivate a dynamic ecosystem of collaborations, connecting artists with diverse producers to create a rich and evolving sonic tapestry that resonates within the market- and travel outside of it."

The Chinese region is "very diverse," he added, with the region releasing new, exciting, and high-quality music in the past year at a faster rate than it has done in decades. Sony Music China released 3,700 songs in 2024 alone. But a lot of the region's exciting growth fundamentally comes down to artist development, Chan explains, as well as seeking out collaborations with other talents.

That included Lars performing with American band One Republic at the Bilibili New Year's Eve Gala in December 2024.

And this is something the Sony Music team are keen to replicate. Chan explained that the expansive international reach of Sony Music is a huge asset for artists – giving them region and country specific guidance.

"We are a great window for artists to get their artistry all over the world and achieve global success with their music," he said, adding that Sony Music is best placed to understand a large and diverse range of audiences.

What truly excites us about Lars is his unwavering passion and dedication. He's got that spark, that hunger to be the best, which is exactly the kind of talent we love to champion in this vibrant and competitive region."

ANDREW CHAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER OF SONY MUSIC
ENTERTAINMENT CHINA



Demand for music continues to expand but reaching your audience is more challenging than ever. For us, we think about how we develop strategies that can help an artist to meet their fan – instead of trying to force their fans into one place or style."

DENNIS KOOKER
PRESIDENT, GLOBAL DIGITAL
BUSINESS, SONY MUSIC
ENTERTAINMENT

But Chan's grand ambition is to bring C-pop – or Chinese pop – to the international stage in the same way K-pop has flourished. "I think it will take a lot of trial and error," he said, ensuring that the label's strategy is always fluid.

Dennis Kooker, President of Sony's Global Digital Business, explains that these global strategies can be a difficult balance – but are ultimately fan-led.

"Demand for music continues to expand but reaching your audience is more challenging than ever," Kooker said. "For us, we think about how we develop strategies that can help an artist to meet their fan – instead of trying to force their fans into one place or style."

He added: "This opens up a whole range of possibilities from a digital and real-life perspective."

So aside from live performances, Lars's team have also been looking at how social media can be utilised to boost fan engagement. Thanks to his growing Gen Z fanbase, Lars has garnered considerable attention on Weibo, one of the largest social media platforms in China. He trended on more than 36 topics and accumulated 1.6 billion views within a single month in 2024. Chan adds, "In today's digital age, social media isn't just a promotional tool; it's a vital channel for authentic artist-fan connection. Our approach with Lars is to

Lars Huang photo courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment



strategically integrate social platforms into his overall career trajectory, fostering a dynamic and engaged community."

His viral single, *Soaked in Rain*, enjoyed significant popularity, amassing 14 million streams within its first week and generating over one million comments on China digital streaming platforms.

In October 2024, Lars released his album titled *Fun! Only*, which achieved an extraordinary sales milestone of over 100,000 physical copies within a mere 24 hours. This remarkable

accomplishment landed him the prestigious IFPI 5x Platinum sales recognition.

Building on this momentum, Sony Music also supported Lars with the launch of his eagerly anticipated concert tour, which started in 2024 with a thrilling five-stadium spectacle, entertaining sold-out crowds of over 10,000 at each stop.

And with Sony Music's backing, Lars is growing his artistry, broadening his influence, and crafting an impressive portfolio of high-quality music to become a more global star.

MUSIC POLICY PRIORITIES

FUELLING GLOBAL MUSIC GROWTH

1

Recognise music's value

Music has always had deep cultural and economic value and public policies must ensure that this value is fully recognised and protected in the marketplace. This means requiring that anyone who seeks to use copyright-protected music on their platform - or as part of their service - obtains permission from the rightsholder before using the music. The breakdown in this long-established incentive structure would create significant harm.

In 2023, record labels
invested a total of
US\$8.1bn
in A&R and marketing
in the global music industry

This was
30.8%
of their revenues

Xolly Mncwango photo by Malliwandla
Rikhotso - RikoStillz Studio

2

Support music's public performance and broadcasting rights

IFPI works with music licensing companies across the world to help ensure that those who produce and perform music used for public performance and broadcast are fairly rewarded for their work. In most countries, broadcasters are required to pay a royalty to the artists, producers and songwriters that created the music they play. However, two of the largest economies in the world - the USA and Japan - still lack full broadcasting and public performance rights. Furthermore, rates paid by businesses playing music are in many countries so low that they fail to compensate artists and producers fairly for the use of their music.

Performance rights can provide a vital and growing revenue stream for artists and make an important contribution to growing music economies. To achieve this, governments should fully establish these rights and allow rightsholders to organise the efficient collections of revenue.

Beyoncé photo by
Blair Caldwell

Fleetwood Mac photo courtesy
of Warner Music Group