

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 7, 2022

## **CARY BAKER TO RETIRE FROM 42-YEAR MUSIC PUBLICITY CAREER ON MARCH 21**

***Following a short break, will write books about music***

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — In 42 years of PR work, I've never written a press release in first person. So please allow me this once-in-a-lifetime exception:

After more than four decades, I, Cary Baker, will end my career in music publicity — designing and implementing media strategies for recording artists, albums, tours, events and music books — on March 21, 2022.

My first priority will be to sleep in (I'd made it a point to begin work at 6:30 a.m. PT for the past 20 years) and maybe travel a bit. After a short recharge, I hope to begin work on a couple of books — books about music history. More on that soon.

My career in music publicity has spanned 42 years, six record labels (publicity chief at Capitol, I.R.S., Morgan Creek, Discovery, Enigma and Ovation), and three independent publicity companies including the firm I've operated since 2004, [Conqueroo](#).

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It all began in Chicago during my high school years (1969-73). I became very interested in blues, of which my hometown was a hub. I sent the *Chicago Reader* an unsolicited, typed manuscript about a blind street singer and slide guitarist named [Blind Arvella Gray](#), who played every Sunday in the city's Maxwell Street district, and it became the cover story in the neophyte alt-weekly's third edition. That led to additional freelancing. While studying journalism at Northern Illinois University, I wrote about music for the college newspaper as well as for *Creem*, *Living Blues*, *Illinois Entertainer*, *Bomp!*, and *Prairie Sun*. Inspired by the DIY movement, I also launched a small indie label from my college apartment called [Fiction Records](#). I simultaneously edited an alt-weekly in Rockford, Ill., where the biggest story in town was the emergence of hometown band Cheap Trick (who became my longtime friends).

On graduating and moving back to Chicago, I wrote for *Billboard* magazine, which maintained a downtown Chicago office. My editor had astute news reporting sensibilities and routinely sent me back to the IBM Selectric for many a re-write. I owe him a lot. My story about Glenview, Ill. country music, jazz and quadrasonic label [Ovation Records](#) — announcing its foray into pop and rock — resulted in me being recruited as that label's National Director of Publicity and Advertising. I accepted, and learned much about country music thanks to the label's Music Row office, whose roster included [The Kendalls](#), [Joe Sun](#), Vern Gosdin. (Ovation also released DJ Steve Dahl's infamous disco parody.) My desk was equipped only with a telephone, typewriter, Rolodex and (importantly) coffee. That's all one needed in those days.

Following a layoff at Ovation's Chicago office in 1981, I spent three years freelancing (adding *Trouser Press*, *Mix*, *Hit Parader* and Jann Wenner's *Record* magazine as outlets) along with handling PR for the Chicago venue called Tuts. In 1984, I heard of a job opening for Publicity Director at one of my favorite labels on earth, [I.R.S. Records](#). I applied, and so did 60 others. I flew to Los Angeles, interviewed, and was asked to make the move — and pronto, as the label was readying new albums by R.E.M., the Go-Go's, and the Alarm. It was amazing to work on the A&M Records Lot (I'll never forget walking to my car after work one night and hearing Herb Alpert's trumpet wafting from a nearby office) and, when the company moved, at Universal Studios. I became part of the team that broke R.E.M. (I pitched their first [Rolling Stone](#) and *SPIN* covers and *Saturday Night Live* appearance), as well as Timbuk3 (also on *SNL*),

Concrete Blonde, Fine Young Cannibals, General Public, and The dB's. My boss, label president Jay Boberg, became a mentor and friend. It was an unforgettable four years!

I moved on to [Capitol Records](#) in 1988, heading the bicoastal publicity department of eight people — a new challenge for one not schooled in staff management. While at the Capitol Tower on Vine Street, I worked closely with Bonnie Raitt, the Smithereens, Tina Turner, the Beastie Boys, Johnny Clegg & Savuka, and Donny Osmond. I was there when Raitt won her many Grammys for *Nick of Time*, the Smithereens broke onto *SNL*, and the Beastie Boys were feted on the roof of the Capitol Tower for an album release launch party. Paul McCartney released his *Flowers in the Dirt* album in that window as well.

I left in 1991, concluding that corporate politics was probably not my forte, I returned to my indie roots and took a job as VP Publicity at [Enigma Records](#). David Cassidy was the priority du jour. Around this time, several new labels were being launched: Interscope, Zoo, Imago, Hollywood, and Morgan Creek Records. I submitted a résumé into the last, a division of the film studio Morgan Creek Productions. And while it ultimately fell short of Interscope's sky-high trajectory, it launched with a platinum hit from the *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* soundtrack (Bryan Adams) and worthy albums from Shelby Lynne, Janis Ian, Little Feat, Mary's Danish, Eleven, and Miracle Legion. Highlights were [Late Show With David Letterman](#) appearances by the [two latter bands](#).

My work with [Shelby Lynne](#) was noticed by a few Nashville titans. So when Morgan Creek dissolved its label division, I went to Nashville and met with Sony Music and Garth Brooks' former manager Pam Lewis. I ended up working from the West Coast bureau of Pam's [PLA Media](#). My job included business development as well as publicity, and I brought in clients like Rykodisc's, Motown's and EMI's catalog divisions, Frank Zappa and Ringo Starr's catalogs, John Mayall, and Raffi. I learned much from Pam about running an indie PR shop, and PLA Media thrives to this day.

When I got itchy to work at a label again, I moved to Warner Music Group's [Discovery Records](#), whose chairman was Elektra Records founder [Jac Holzman](#). There I worked on projects by Bernie Taupin's Farm Dogs, Too Much Joy, Candye Kane, Antone's Records, Willy DeVille, and a duo I helped sign to the label, the Finn Brothers (I'd worked with Tim Finn and Neil Finn's Crowded House while at Capitol). Three years in, I was among those laid off in a corporate reorganization. By now, I was used to this.

Partnering with a longtime PR colleague, I co-founded the Baker/Northrop Media Group in 1998. Our clientele included Robert Cray, Cheap Trick, Yes, Delbert McClinton, HBO's Reverb program, and a young, then-unknown, blues-based artist named Susan Tedeschi. On our watch, Tedeschi gleaned much buzz, culminating in a gold-certified debut LP and a 2000 Grammy nomination for Best New Artist.

My next (and final) act in music publicity was to fly solo. I launched [Conqueroo](#) — its name derived from Chicago blues lyrics as a nod to my origins — and became busier than ever. First came singer-songwriter [James McMurtry](#) in aught four with his album *Live in Aught Three*. James became Conqueroo's steadiest client, and I believe we helped him carve a national presence in the media. Then came blues legend Bobby Rush, Willie Nile, Janiva Magness, Chris Hillman, Billy Joe Shaver, Kinky Friedman, Rodney Crowell, Nils Lofgren, Paul Kelly, Colin Hay, the Mavericks, the Hoodoo Gurus, Peter Himmelman, Ruthie Foster, Van Dyke Parks, Dan Penn, Swamp Dogg, Freedy Johnston, Marshall Crenshaw, Tommy Keene, The dB's, Cidny Bullens, Rev. Peyton's Big Damn Band, Jim White, Chuck Mead, Eilen Jewell, Tom Freund, Concord/Craft, BMG, Bear Family, and Proper/Last Music, among hundreds of others. Conqueroo became one of the pre-eminent roots, Americana, blues, power pop, reissue and music-book publicity companies in America! We had numerous Grammy nominations and wins in our 18 years.

One of Conqueroo's trademark clients — an entity that became something of a second family for me — was [Omnivore Recordings](#), whom I began to represent in 2011. Omnivore presented a roster befitting its name: Alex Chilton/Big Star, Buck Owens, Jeff Tweedy, Urge Overkill, Art Pepper, Townes Van Zandt, Old 97s, the Dream Syndicate, Lone Justice, Lloyd Cole, The Posies, Trip Shakespeare, Game Theory, Les McCann, Camper Van Beethoven, The Muffs, The Continental Drifters, The dB's, Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple, Tim Buckley, Peter Case, Allen Ginsberg, Hasaan Ibn Ali, Dennis Coffey, The Rave-

Ups. Omnivore satisfied my craving for so many musical food groups. I learned much about artists, labels, and repertoire of which I hadn't been previously aware.

In 2006, I was named Blues Publicist of the Year at [The Blues Foundation](#)'s Keeping the Blues Alive awards. I returned to the podium in Memphis with [Bobby Rush](#), his manager, Jeff DeLia, and the Omnivore folks when the bluesman's retrospective box set ([Chicken Heads: A 50-Year History of Bobby Rush](#)), which we all co-produced, won Historic Album of the Year in the 2017 Blues Music Awards.

Conqueroo of course was not just me. Within a year of launching the company, I realized I needed help — especially in keeping up with our artists' tours (especially that of the ceaselessly itinerant McMurtry). Julie Arkenstone came aboard 13 years ago and is the best tour publicist with whom I've ever worked. Brian O'Neal and Wendy Brynford-Jones joined as national publicists, enabling us to take on more artists. They've all become great friends and loyal associates. I can't recommend them highly enough!

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During the slowdown of the pandemic, we all had a moment to reflect. I looked at my life, my age (66), did some math, and figured out it may be time to shake things up once again, and perhaps embark upon a less stressful life. It seemed a good time for me to leave music publicity — after 42 years, and amid a changing media landscape. Newspapers, magazines, NPR and TV, my primary passions, have been eclipsed by podcasts, and a never-ending schedule of single premieres.

I'd begun writing mini music biographies on Facebook for my own amusement, and liked how doing so seemed to reconnect me both to my passion for music and to my journalism origins. So when I leave music publicity, I will begin work on books — music histories. I'll also seek to write liner notes, produce reissues, and write the odd article. I'll travel a bit, read, take a Tuesday morning yoga class perhaps, attend a Wednesday matinee movie, visit the art museum on a Thursday, and, most importantly, not set the alarm for 6:30 a.m. each morning. I will continue my pro bono PR work for the Wild Honey Foundation's live music events benefitting autism research.

When I began in music publicity in 1979, it was very much an ancillary function of music marketing — reflected in our then-meager titles and paychecks. We were always distant second fiddle to radio promotion department. Over four decades, the playing field has levelled; publicity has evolved to play a critical strategic role in an album's setup. One doesn't dare release a recording now without a forceful announcement, perhaps entailing an online song premiere that delivers direct clicks to YouTube, Spotify and Amazon, resulting in tangible streaming and physical revenues. Music publicity in the 2020s requires a sharp sense of strategy, as well as contacts in every crevice of the media.

Music publicity has been the job of a lifetime. But I've decided not to let it be my job FOR a lifetime. So I've made the major decision to step away on the date of the spring solstice. The field remains in the hands of many great professionals.

[Julie](#), [Brian](#) and [Wendy](#) will continue their work in the field independently, and I urge everybody to reach out to them. Many Conqueroo clients will segué to [Missing Piece Group](#) in New Jersey and Nashville, an extraordinary company with a similar musical skew to Conqueroo.

My heart is filled with gratitude to everybody who believed in me, and to every artist that entrusted me with their career. I will be on the sidelines, listening to music and (when safe again) hoping to attend some of my annual music symposiums ([Folk Alliance](#), [AmericanaFest](#), [Blues Music Awards](#)) as a fan and civilian. I hope to see you there.

A million thanks for giving this teenage blues fan from the Chicago suburbs an amazing and unforgettable career. Car(r)y on!

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