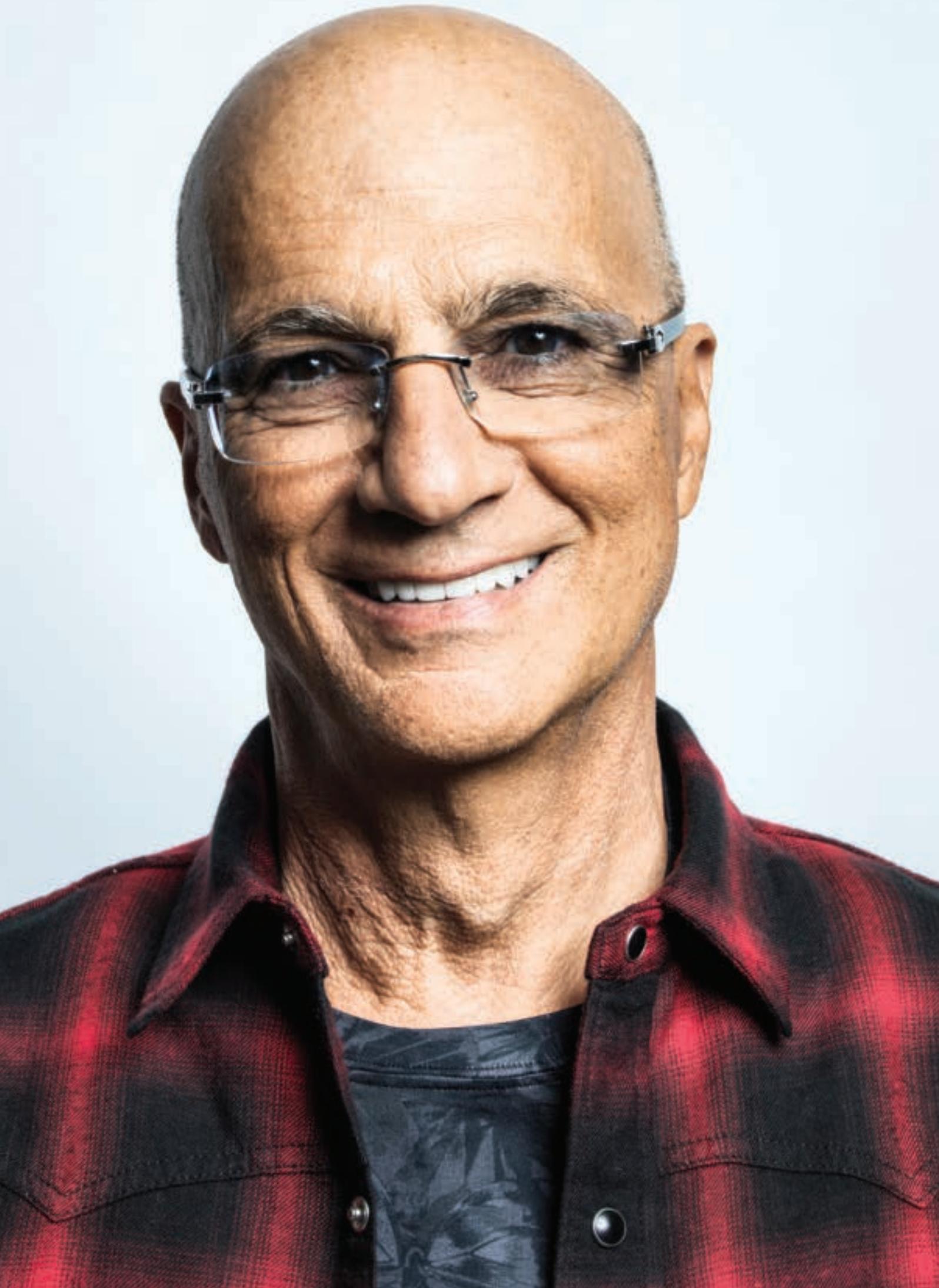


Jimmy Iovine in
London, 2018



JIMMY IOVINE

HIS VISIONARY CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THE MUSIC BUSINESS HAVE
CHANGED OUR WORLD.

BY PARKE PUTERBAUGH

The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame has inducted numerous music-industry personnel, but seldom has one person excelled at so many aspects of the business as Jimmy Iovine. He could've been inducted for the work he did at any one of several points in his lengthy career: as a producer of some of the most popular and ambitious rock acts of the 1970s and 1980s; as cofounder of Interscope Records, a wildly successful startup label that captured the edgy vibe of the 1990s; and as cofounder (with Dr. Dre) of the Beats franchise, which has steered the intersection of technology and culture in the twenty-first century.

A hard-nosed renaissance man, Iovine extracted the best from his artists and producers on the creative side, and he brought a creative mindset to business pursuits when he pivoted in that direction. Driven by an all-consuming love of music, he exhibited a unique capacity for reinvention that allowed him to create a succession of innovative niches over the decades. As Bruce Springsteen noted, "Jimmy's career is based on a tremendous lack of fear of moving forward." Like such fellow visionaries as David Geffen and Steve Jobs, Iovine has impacted popular culture in significant and lasting ways.

Iovine was born into a close Italian family from Brooklyn, where his father worked as a longshoreman. He was drawn to music and played in a band in his

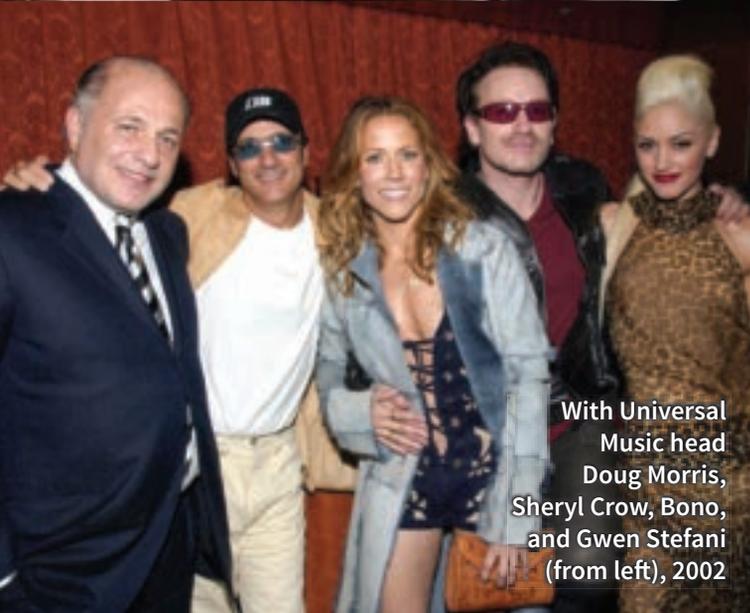
mid-teens. But Iovine realized success as a musician was likely beyond his grasp and focused instead on the nuts and bolts of recording – to wit, engineering and production. Through a family connection to songwriting legend Ellie Greenwich, Iovine got a few referrals that led to an entry-level job at the Record Plant, a New York studio run by engineer Roy Cicala. In 1974, Iovine got his first break when Cicala called him in on Easter Sunday to serve as second engineer on a session for John Lennon. He wound up working on Lennon's *Walls and Bridges* and *Rock 'N' Roll* albums, with the Los Angeles sessions for the latter placing him alongside producer Phil Spector.

From those fortuitous liaisons, Iovine served as an engineer and then a full-fledged producer for a veritable who's who of rock royalty. He engineered the demanding sessions for Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* and *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, both of which were painstakingly assembled.

"Bruce taught me a work ethic," Iovine said in *The Defiant Ones*, an HBO docuseries about the intertwined careers of himself and Dr. Dre. Out of that experience grew a dogged commitment to the pursuit of excellence: "I said to myself, 'No fun, no life, no nothin'. You're gonna put 100 percent into this.'" He brought that uncompromising ethic to bear on his production of *Easter*, Patti Smith's breakthrough album, for



Assisting on John
Lennon sessions,
Record Plant, New
York City, 1972



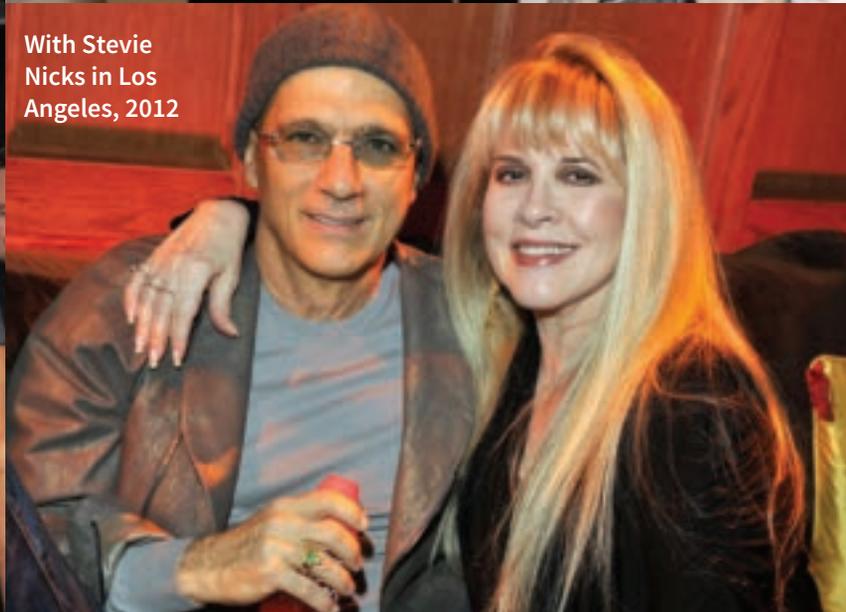
With Universal
Music head
Doug Morris,
Sheryl Crow, Bono,
and Gwen Stefani
(from left), 2002



Unveiling Beats by
Dre headphones
with Dr. Dre, 2011



With Patti Smith and
Bruce Springsteen at the 25th
Anniversary Rock & Roll Hall of
Fame Concert, 2009



With Stevie
Nicks in Los
Angeles, 2012

“ IOVINE HAS IMPACTED POPULAR CULTURE IN SIGNIFICANT AND LASTING WAYS. ”

which he procured the Springsteen outtake “Because the Night.” It became Smith’s first hit in 1978. Iovine has referred to his work with Springsteen and Smith as “my college education.”

Iovine’s next triumphs came on the West Coast, where he produced 1979’s *Damn the Torpedoes*, which made superstars of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and was “the best album I ever made, sonically.” Then came Stevie Nicks’ *Bella Donna*, the quadruple platinum album that launched her solo career outside of Fleetwood Mac. He paired Nicks and Petty on “Stop Draggin’ My Heart Around,” an outtake from Petty’s *Hard Promises* sessions that rocketed to Number Three, propelling both artists’ careers forward.

In the 1980s, there was also an intense bout of work with U2, for whom Iovine produced *Under a Blood Red Sky* and the double album *Rattle and Hum*. During the era when postpunk and New Wave were ascendant, Iovine produced key albums for Dire Straits, Eurythmics, Simple Minds, Graham Parker, and the Pretenders. As the decade wore on, however, Iovine was wearing out. “I just needed to stop,” he recalled in *The Defiant Ones*. “I didn’t want to see a studio. I was done.”

While he was finished with hands-on record production, Iovine now turned to the business side, cofounding Interscope Records. Eventually Iovine became co-chairman (with Ted Field) of IGA (Interscope, Geffen, and A&M Records). Under Iovine’s tutelage, Interscope quickly began scoring hits with artists pushing the envelope, creatively and culturally. Interscope became a platform for some of the most confrontational music and controversial artists of the 1990s. A liaison with the Death Row label made Interscope a conduit for West Coast gangsta rap. Hardcore artists launched from Interscope’s stable included both rappers (Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem) and rockers (Nine Inch Nails). This roster made Interscope one of the most visible and profitable labels of the 1990s, but it also put the company and its artists in the crosshairs of the culture wars raging at the time.

Iovine recognized that musical forms were changing, and that the most provocative artists were speaking truth to power in uncensored language that resonated with the discontented youth of the 1990s. Looking back, he noted that “the nineties were really a volatile time in America, and music was incredible and really had something to say.” Interscope, he added, was all about “empowering those artists.”

Iovine realized that hip-hop had become what rock & roll often had been – a voice for young people and a platform for rebellion. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*’s

David Fricke, he likened Interscope’s hip-hop stars to rock & roll’s edgiest figures in their prime: “When I saw Snoop Dog and Dre in the video for ‘Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang,’ it reminded me of Mick and Keith . . . in the swagger, the beat, what they were singing about.”

“There’s something in him that’s attracted to rage,” said Bono of Iovine in *The Defiant Ones*. “It’s opera . . . Big emotions. Violence. That energy, that rage, he has it. He just doesn’t come off as angry. But under the skin of it, he likes blood and bones.”

In a way, Iovine’s endeavor to move some of the edgiest music into the popular sphere reflected a comment he made in an interview I did with him in 1990 about producer Phil Spector, one of his seminal influences. “[Spector] added a drama to music that I don’t think existed before him,” said Iovine. “Making dark records and pop records are separate things. When you can combine the two worlds, you’ve achieved greatness.”

By that yardstick, Interscope can be viewed as one of the most significant labels of modern times. Still, the label wasn’t entirely defined by gangsta rap and industrial rock. Iovine and company also nurtured the careers of such left-field pop and rock acts as No Doubt (and the solo work of Gwen Stefani), Primus, Black Eyed Peas, Nelly Furtado, and Lady Gaga. Even the veteran likes of U2 returned to Iovine’s purview as Interscope artists with their comeback album *All That You Can’t Leave Behind*.

But the most propitious relationship that came about at Interscope was between Jimmy Iovine and Dr. Dre. It commenced with the 1992 release of *The Chronic*, Dr. Dre’s post-N.W.A solo album, a defining work of the hip-hop era. It progressed to their innovative twenty-first-century collaborations on headphones (Beats by Dr. Dre) and streaming (Beats Music). Realizing that peer-to-peer file sharing was damaging the music business and depriving artists of revenue, Iovine believed that streaming services represented the industry’s future. He and Dr. Dre got ahead of the curve with Beats Music, which they famously sold to Apple in 2014 for three billion dollars.

A year earlier, in 2013, Iovine and Dr. Dre (born Andre Young) began paying it forward by donating seventy million dollars to establish an arts, technology, and business program at the University of Southern California. The USC Iovine-Young Academy has been designed to bridge the worlds of technology and creativity for young people looking for careers in the music industry. As with everything he’s done, the program reflects Iovine’s canny instinct for, in his own words, “moving popular culture around.”