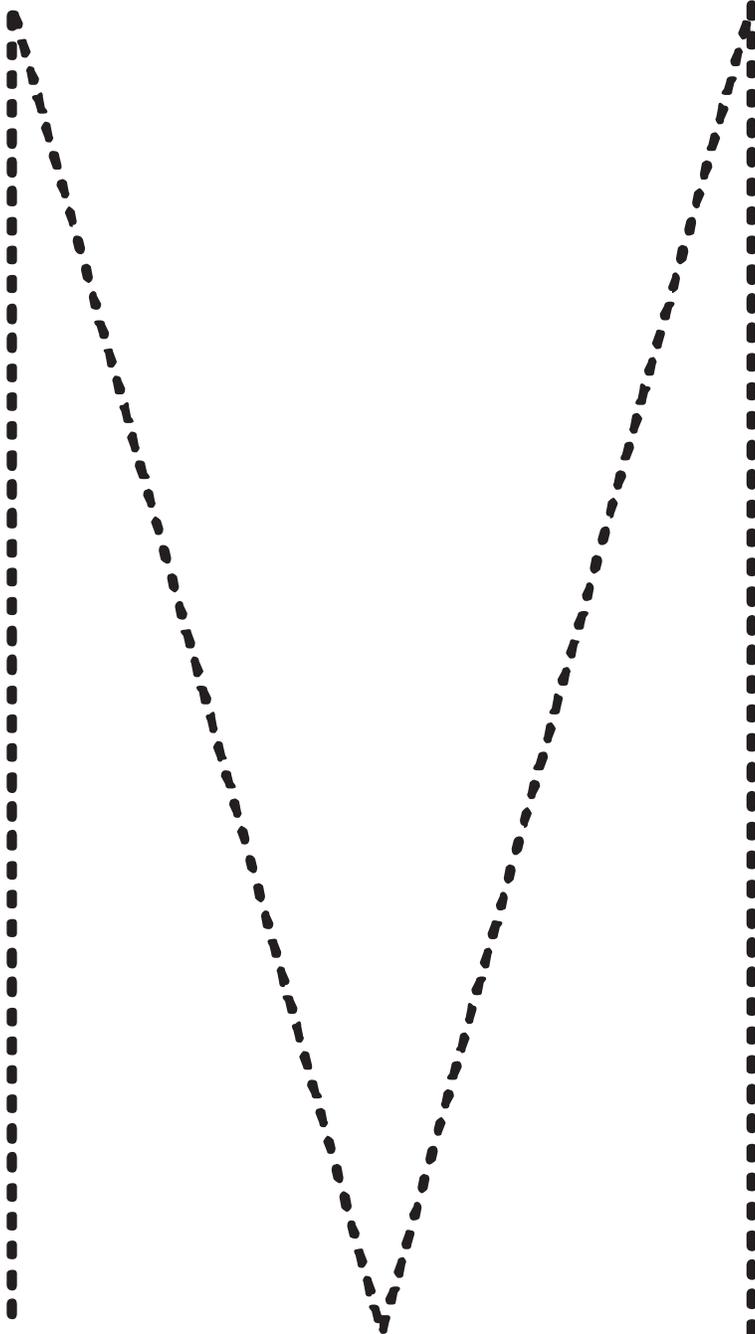


# Max *Lousada*



Max Lousada's ascendancy to the CEO of Recorded Music post at **Warner Music Group** completed the "Britification" of the three U.S. majors' leadership. But it was also another indicator that a new generation of leaders had emerged. And Lousada, though young, emphatically embraces the characteristics of a classic "record man."

Those who met with him at the **Chateau Marmont** around the time of the 2017 **Grammys**, before his title was



“WE HAVE KEPT THE LIGHTS ON DURING THE LONG DARK DECADE OF DECLINE, AND IT TOOK CONVICTION, AND AN UNSHAKEABLE BELIEF THAT WHAT WE DO REALLY MATTERS.”

# *The Believer*



**TO THE MAX:** Lousada with Rita Ora, Ed Sheeran and Stormzy

announced, report that the tall, bearded redhead cut an imposing figure, and his engaging persona, easy smile and robust sense of humor made an immediate impression. He asked probing, thoughtful questions about people who worked at WMG, these insiders report, as well as those who didn't. Here was another British music executive who embraced the proven strategy of selecting a creative exec to head up his company's content centers, ably assisted by savvy marketing execs. It was clear Lousada was contemplating

sweeping changes to the Warner world.

At the time he appeared to be considering an offer for a top Sony post in NYC, but in retrospect he was in the process of negotiating a much bigger job at WMG. Many British expats working for the competition had been saying for months that they were certain he'd be staying at Warner.

"Max is decisive, has 360 vision, has ambition for the company and great people skills," says Warner Bros. Co-Chairman/COO Tom Corson, who

hadn't met Lousada before talks began to bring him over to WMG. "I think there's a reason people want to work for him; it feels fresh, like a major move toward the future. He's a modern leader. He's not about just getting hits and letting the biz-dev guys figure out the structure of the business. He's very aware of and interested in new, developing channels and where they fit into our growth equation. He's impressive, and is building a team of ambitious, forward-thinking and diverse executives."

“I met Max a long time ago, because of his relationship with Ed Sheeran and my friendship with Ed and his manager, **Stuart Camp**,” recalls  **Scooter Braun**. “We met at a show and completely hit it off; what he’s been able to do in his time at Warner is remarkable. Not only that, but he’s one of the guys who’s at the front of a new generation of leadership in the music industry. He thinks outside the box and he loves music. I’m happy to see a good guy in a big position.”

“Max is focused, a genius, erratic,” observed Sheeran. “You’re either very, very good at numbers or very good at making art, and he’s good at both. Just keep winning.”

“I haven’t met an artist yet that doesn’t like Max or want to work with him,” Camp told *Bloomberg*. “Max is the peacemaker and the deciding vote. He has an understanding and wisdom that everyone appreciates.”

“In my humble opinion,” asserts **Ron Laffitte**, “the most powerful thing we have in the music business is a great song, and what I’ve always enjoyed the most about my relationship with Max is that every conversation has been about the records. He’s a record man who truly loves records.”

“Max is the perfect package: a man of honor and principle with a brilliant mind and a deep love of music,” reads a statement from Warner stalwarts **Coldplay**.

“Max is brilliant at creating an environment where artists and executives feel backed by a real belief in their abilities,” notes **Warner Bros. U.K. President Phil Christie**. “That faith helps people achieve things they might otherwise have thought weren’t possible. He has a clear vision for how Warner and its culture should evolve, and it’s a great feeling to be part of the team that’s helping accomplish that on a global scale.”

The native of London’s Tooting Bec neighborhood grew up with an activist dad, and the sounds of left-leaning British rockers like **The Clash** and **Billy Bragg** helped form the soundtrack of his childhood. The multicultural local community, meanwhile, helped shape his eclectic sensibility. He attended the University



**IN COUNTRY:** At the CMAs with Warner Nashville artist **Brett Eldredge**, WMN boss **John Esposito**, and artists **Bebe Rexha** and **James Blunt**



**Teatime with Robert Plant**



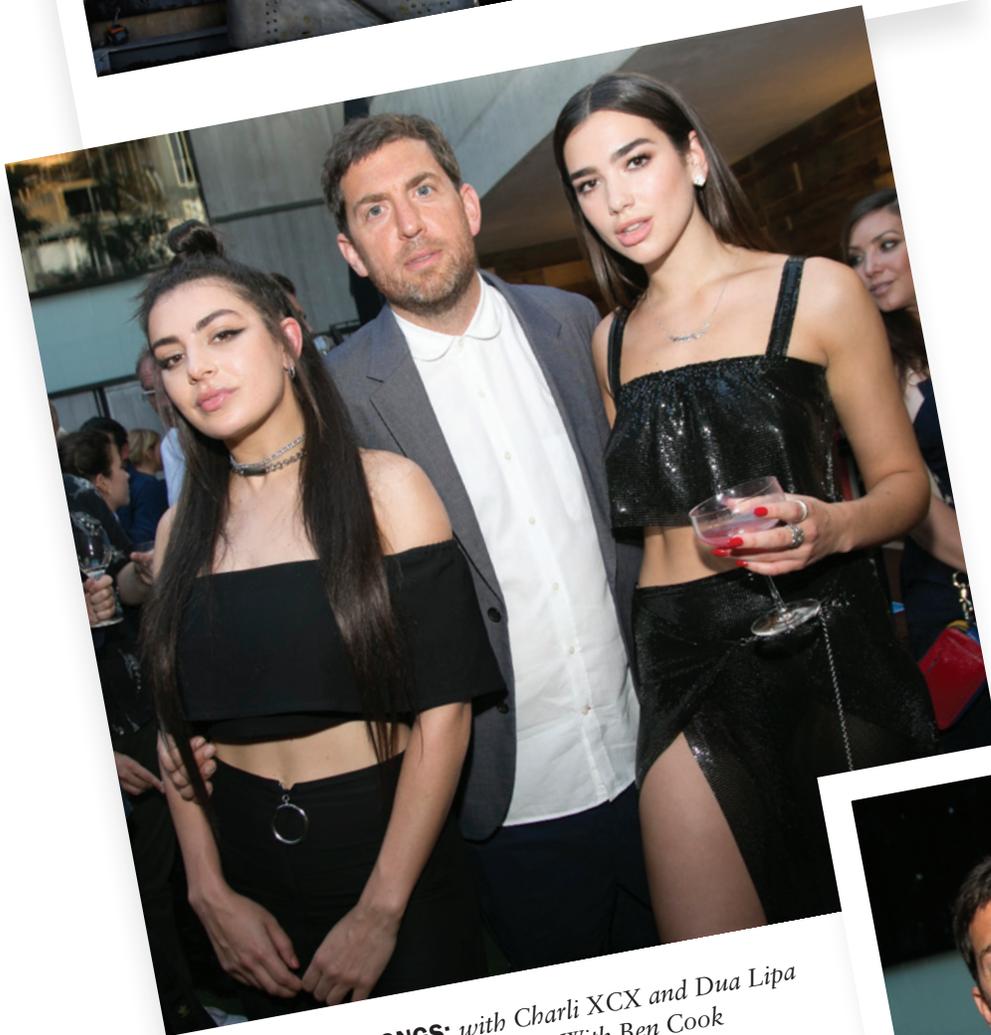
of Brighton for a time, but his greatest education there came outside the classroom—from new friends in the DJ world. Having fallen in love with indie soul, hip-hop, acid jazz and electronic music, he left the university after six months and quickly became a fixture—and then a player—on the local club scene.

His career began in the late '90s, when he launched the multifaceted collective **In a Silent Way** (named after a groundbreaking Miles Davis album). The venture combined import-export, management, apparel and music, hawking everything from European rap imports to Adidas shelltoes, using vans as mobile retail emporiums.

After a few brief stints at indie companies, Lousada started his own instrumental electronic label, **Ultimate Dilemma**. Two years later, he was in New York, having been brought aboard **Rawkus Records** by Nick Phillips; as Managing Director for ex-U.S. he helped expand the label's influential roster, which included such forward-looking hip-hop acts as **Mos Def** (for whom he secured airplay on **BBC Radio 1**), **Talib Kweli** and **Pharoahe Monch**. He carried on with **Ultimate Dilemma** at the same time.

"If I had to describe him," Sony/ATV's **Guy Moot**, who met Lousada during this period, told *Music Week*, "I would say he has this youthful exuberance and excitement about music and artists, but a very mature brain in terms of seeing the bigger picture and embracing new technology and media."

He transitioned to



[above] **SIREN SONGS:** with Charli XCX and Dua Lipa  
[right] **ACROSS THE ATLANTIC:** With Ben Cook



Mushroom Records as Head of A&R in 2002; his first signing was electronic-pop hybrid **Zero 7**, which featured an intriguing vocalist named **Sia**. He also worked on projects by **Muse**, **Garbage**, **Ash** and DJ **Paul Oakenfold**.

During this period, a meeting with **Korda Marshall**, founder of affiliated label **Infectious**, would prove something of a milestone for Lousada. “We talked about music, we talked about culture, we talked about artist development,” the latter recalled to **Music Business Worldwide** in 2017. “And in that very first meeting, he showed me some of the truths that have stayed with me throughout my career... enjoying the artist’s journey and [that] it’s not a sprint, it’s a build. There’s going to be lots of ups and downs... it’s about celebrating the artist’s difference—their uniqueness, rather than trying to get them to conform. He showed me you

can dream big without selling out.”

Warner acquired Mushroom in 2004, after which Lousada was tapped as Head of A&R and Marshall became MD of **East/West U.K.** They decided to rechristen the company **Atlantic U.K.** as a tribute to the label that had delivered classic recordings by **Ray Charles**, **Aretha Franklin**, **John Coltrane** and **Led Zeppelin**, among other greats. Lousada began spending more time in New York and got to know **Ahmet Ertegun**, who had shepherded the original label to greatness.

In 2009, at the tender age of 29, he was anointed Atlantic U.K. Chairman. It’s particularly noteworthy that on his watch the label developed a fleet of home-grown successes rather than merely importing them. His tenure saw the minting of such British stars as **Ed Sheeran**, **James Blunt**, **Rudimental**, **Jess Glynne**, **Paolo Nutini** and more, while he also oversaw the U.K. success of acts like **Bruno Mars**, **twenty**

**one pilots** and **Jason Mraz**.

“My earliest memories of Max were those heady days at Atlantic in 2004,” publicist **Barbara Charone** recalled to **Music Week**. “I remember going to Max’s office, more like a flat than an office, with lots of mood boards for bands he was trying to sign. Those mood boards said a lot about Max. He always cared about the finer creative details. He enjoyed the process of breaking an artist. And he understood it. He’s a music man, he understands artists and has such a lovely manner about him.”

“Max’s achievements at Atlantic U.K. have been remarkable,” reads a quote from WMG Chairman **Steve Cooper** that accompanied the announcement that Lousada would assume the top British post. “Artists that have emerged under his stewardship are among the most successful

“THIS LIFE IN MUSIC HAS GIVEN ME SOME INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCES, SOME INTENSE HIGHS AND SOME DEVASTATINGLY CRUSHING LOWS.”



ROYALTY: With Charli XCX, will.i.am and Royal Blood



**STERLING:** At the Brit Awards, Lousada suggests Ed Sheeran and Len Blavatnik lend the British government a few quid until payday.

British acts in recent years, not only in the local market but on the world stage... he will have extremely strong support when he takes the role. His appointment ensures stability and continuity during the handover period and leaves us well positioned for growth in this important and influential market.”

WMG owner **Len Blavatnik** told Music Business Worldwide that Lousada “has developed Warner Music U.K. into the premier home for British artists and a center of music innovation.”

“Max Lousada was the first person I met at a major record label,” Glynne recalled to Music Week. “We sat down for a lengthy amount of time and talked about life, music, opportunity, what it was that I wanted. I was blown away by the whole experience. I left that meeting feeling so welcomed, warmed,

excited, inspired and, in that moment, I knew that was where I wanted to be. I really didn’t want to meet anyone else. He’s been nothing but supportive and inspiring, and he’s made so many things happen that I didn’t think could even be possible, even in my dreams.”

In 2013, Lousada succeeded **Christian Tattersfield** as CEO of Warner Music U.K. Sheeran’s *x* dropped the following year and became one of the biggest records in the world. Lousada integrated Warner Bros. U.K. and **Parlophone**, upping **Phil Christie** to President of the former and **Miles Leonard** to the latter. “We’ve always been most successful when we’ve had a collective of strong, independently minded, artist-centric labels with their own creative identities,” Lousada told *HITS* in 2016.

Big successes from established super-

stars like Coldplay, Muse and **Enya** accompanied such breakout acts as **Biffy Clyro**, **Foals** and **Royal Blood**. New signings included **Dua Lipa** and **Rationale**. In addition to overseeing an array of other recorded successes, he launched **The Firepit**, a content development division and technology lab.

“It feels like we’re entering a really important era for British music,” he noted in his 2016 *HITS* interview. “It’s always been one of our greatest exports, and now that streaming has broken down geographic borders, the opportunity for us and for our artists is unprecedented. The idea of ‘local versus global’ is increasingly anachronistic. Today, every campaign is a global campaign from day one.”

In 2015 he also stepped into the role of **BRITs** Committee Chairman, taking responsibility for revitalizing a

British music institution that had been losing audience.

He became CEO Recorded Music for WMG worldwide in 2017. Lousada moved quickly once installed in the top post, recruiting **Aaron Bay-Schuck** and Tom Corson as co-heads of Warner Bros. The latter's proven track record in deal-making, marketing and logistics had already proved an effective complement to strong A&R, which was the former's specialty. In the U.K., he upped execs **Peter Breeden** and **Mel Fox**. In mid-2018 he also broke out **Elektra Music Group** as a freestanding label entity.

"Max is a very interesting character," Sheeran told *Music Week*, noting that achieving Lousada's facility with both business and A&R "is very difficult to do. He has weird strategic things that he'll just come out with off the cuff, and they'll be the most genius thing in the world. Max is definitely someone that I go to for advice very often, and his advice is always spot-on."

In 2018, Warner Music U.K. earned a whopping 17 BRIT Award nominations, five of which went to Dua Lipa and four to Sheeran. The company also took four **Music Week Awards**, with Lousada earning the prestigious **Strat Award**. His speech testified to the values and priorities that have sustained him throughout his career.

"This life in music has given me some incredible experiences, some intense highs and some devastatingly crushing lows," he said. "It's the promise of jeopardy in every artist signing, the thrill of seeing the act get the wins they deserve and the heart-break when they don't.

"This is no place for passengers. You have to love it, you have to be committed to the act, you have to believe in the song. You have to have real faith, and this generation of music people have seen their faith tested more than most. We have kept the lights on during the long dark decade of decline, and it took conviction and an unshakeable belief that what we do really matters."•



**SONG AND STORY:** With pubco chief Jon Platt