



Sara *Newkirk* Simon:



always felt other,” says **Sara Newkirk Simon** as she recalls the path that led her to a music career and her present perch as a partner and Co-Head of Music at **William Morris Endeavor**. “I never felt like I belonged. I didn’t feel a sense of community; I didn’t feel understood. I definitely felt like an alien. The times when I didn’t, 90% of the time, the thing that made me feel connected to something greater than me—deeper than me—was music.”

She has turned the otherness she felt into a pursuit of supporting artists’ career visions well beyond the traditionally understood scope of “the agent.” She’s worked with **Pharrell Williams** on music, film and politics; figured prominently in **Kanye West’s** partnership with **Nike**; assisted **Selena Gomez’s** successful foray into cutting-edge TV production; and plenty more

besides. “The way to success is being true to who the person is,” she explains. “What are the adjectives that best describe you as a human being? How does every venture that we touch fulfill at least two of these adjectives, so we stay on brand?”

“Sara has the mind of a stone cutter,” declares **Pharrell**. “She looks at every possible angle of a situation to find the optimum desired spot, enabling the talent to shine the best. She is an integral part of my team, and I’m so grateful to have her.”

Endeavor Executive Chairman Patrick Whitesell declares she “has an innate ability to understand an artist’s goals and is relentless in her pursuit of helping them achieve their vision while preserving their artistic integrity. Sara brings enthusiasm and creativity to everything that she touches.”

“Sara is a force; she is selfless, passionate, brilliant, opinionated, and innovative,” declares **Warner Bros. Records CEO Aaron Bay-Schuck**. “However, what I believe sets her apart from her peers is simply how much she cares. She goes above and beyond to develop real and meaningful relationships with her clients and co-workers, challenges everyone around her to be the best and most daring version of themselves, and is always available to talk and give advice at any hour of the day or night.”

“For us, Sara has been the one who’s activated the idea of a full-service agency, because she’s brought the strength of every department at WME,” says **Patriot Management’s Ron Laffitte**, who numbers **Pharrell** among his clients. “Not only has she put incredible opportunities in front of us and helped us navigate which are the ones to accept and which are the ones to steer away from, but she’s also

helped us to determine which are the best deals, what the market opportunities are. Because if you can utilize the scale of a big agency and have all the information, you can make better decisions.”

“I’ve had the good fortune to work with a lot of great agents, but I’ve never worked with an agent like Sara, who brings the entire agency to life and creates opportunities for our client both inside and outside the agency,” **Laffitte** adds. “Certainly, in the case of **Pharrell Williams**, my partner and co-manager **Caron Veazey** and I have worked very hard to assemble a brain trust around **Pharrell**—a group of people who frame his brilliant ideas in the best possible way. And Sara, as much as anybody, has been a visionary and a catalyst for those great ideas.”

“Sara is intelligent, has great taste, and—on top of it all—is a strong woman, which is so important in our industry,” observes **Lighthouse Management & Media CEO Aleen Keshishian**.

Born a hog-farmer’s daughter in **Clarks Hill, Indiana**, **Sara Newkirk** first found refuge from the torpor of her surroundings on the radio dial. “It was a lot of **Fleetwood Mac, Bruce Springsteen, REO Speedwagon**,” she notes, recalling the times “when you’re riding in a car, and you get that sense of Divine Intervention when you’re feeling a certain way, and you change the station and the song you’ve been waiting for was on.”

She was about six when she first heard **Prince**. “He was the first one, the first love,” she says, chronicling what became an “obsession”—but also a blueprint for her assessment of an act. It was **Prince’s** utter control not only of the playing,

Finding the Adjectives



Running down the adjectives with Selena Gomez and Miguel

recording and mixing of his music but every touchpoint, from his look and choreography to the font on his album sleeve, that helped her understand what the cultivation and maintenance of an artist brand really meant. “Consciously or subconsciously, when I’m experiencing an artist for the first time,” she says, “I’m thinking about whether they are hitting those notes, really controlling everything. Prince was so ahead of his time. He knew how to market, but it’s not a marketing plan—he wasn’t making his art to sell it.

He was marketing his heartfelt art.”

The provincial world she lived in, meanwhile, was suffocating. “I got sent to the bathroom at school and had to turn my *Purple Rain* T-shirt—one of two I made my mom buy me at **Blockbuster**—inside out, because it was an R-rated movie,” she recalls. “It was the only way I could stay in school that day.”

She found her way to **Walnut Hill School**, an arts-centered boarding school in Massachusetts, where she studied musical theater for a little while. By age

16, though, she knew “the whole idea of auditioning and rejection is so not me.” (She has nonetheless been a booster as an alumna; “I really try to be supportive of their endowment and the kids who are entering and leaving the school,” she told *Variety* in 2010).

But the school did, in a roundabout way, offer her the entrée she truly sought: **Thos Niles**, who played drums in Boston hardcore band **La Gritona** and whose sister worked in the admissions office. “The idea that this musician would even

talk to some bratty girl at an art school his sister worked at—I'll never forget that," she says, adding that her friendship with members of the band continues to this day. Through that contact she made her way to the **Middle East** club in Beantown, which proved the grungy gateway to her true calling.

"It was magical," she remembers of the nightspot, a Lebanese restaurant with a downstairs stage that hosted the coolest bands in the burgeoning alternative movement. "It was dirty, it was crazy. These two guys who owned it, **Joseph and Nabil [Sater Habib]**, seemingly didn't understand any of the music being booked there, but they empowered the bookers, and you had people like [Pixies founder/frontman] **Frank Black** eating hummus downstairs every day, and the **Mighty Mighty Bosstones** residency every Christmas, and **J. Geils, Morphine, Buffalo Tom, Letters to Cleo**. I just fell in love with all of the music."

The staff, she said, "took pity on me" and offered her an internship; she drew up the calendar and fetched hummus—and then got her next break, working with the Bosstones on their **Hometown Throwdown**. She moved to New York after just a year in Boston, and was summoned by the band's manager, **Ami Bennett**, to take on day-to-day management duties. With space at the offices of **Nasty Little Man**, she not only looked after the Bosstones but looked in on NLM's work with the **Beastie Boys**, including the **Tibetan Freedom Concerts**. She describes remotely handling her management duties as "a nightmare," as the Bosstones played 300 shows per year and she struggled to make ends meet in Manhattan.

"I was waiting tables a good three to four years because it was the only way I could afford to live," she remembers, noting that in addition to her daily music work she'd work restaurant shifts on Wednesday nights and a double on Saturday. All this to afford "a sixth-floor, rat-infested one-bedroom apartment on 28th between 7th and 8th—you couldn't shut the bathroom door. I was living the dream."

The Bosstones sought new management—and Newkirk Simon hooked them up (with **Arthur Spivak** and **Stu Sobol**) before starting meetings for herself. "I

was introduced to **Peter Malkin**, who was renting space from **Cornerstone**; he brought me in there." She was becoming increasingly enamored of hip-hop, she says, and her first client was **Zack de la Rocha** of **Rage Against the Machine**. Then came **Maxwell, M.I.A., TV on the Radio** and **Nas**.

WME came calling in 2006, and what they offered was unconventional. "I got a call from **Dave Wirtschafter**," she says, "and I remember saying to him, 'I don't want to be an agent!' He said, 'Don't be an agent. Do what you do. Work on the marketing and building these clients out in a multifaceted way.' At **Cornerstone**, I was

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The “stone cutter” with Snoop Dogg and Pharrell Williams

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In a clinch with hubby Jesse Simon and Selena Gomez

able to do so many different jobs. I had this management vertical, but then I was also working with them on *The Fader* and the brand work they were doing. I was already doing a version of [what WME suggested] there.”

The time had come, she felt, to make a move. “The truth is that I was getting to my expiration date of the more consuming work,” she admits. “I think being a manager is the hardest job in the business. As far as building out your staff, you’re responsible for hiring the lawyer and the business manager, the agent, picking the record label and publisher—all those things. But you also have to be the people who are on top of what’s happening with the car services, buying the house and all the other personal stuff. I felt I was looking down the barrel of a life of singledom and always being on that treadmill. I wanted to work in a greater volume with more people on a different level with different focus.”

N ewkirk Simon describes the structure at the top of her department as a “triangle,” with partner/head of music **Marc Geiger** at the top and “me and [partner/co-head of music] **Kirk Sommer** in each corner.” That triangle, though, “can spin,” she adds. “Sometimes you’re on top; sometimes you’re on the side.” She has focused on maintaining a profile that isn’t bound by music, as the film, TV, branding and other opportunities she’s helped foster for clients amply demonstrate. At WME, she told *Variety*, “people are encouraged to think in a way that’s unlimited.”

And she has clearly achieved the work-life balance she was seeking, raising two kids with sculptor **Jesse Simon** in L.A.

“She’s a connector of people and truly loves the process of helping artists and executives excel in their careers,”

Bay-Schuck notes. “And through it all, despite her around-the-clock work ethic, she still finds a way to achieve the perfect work and life balance, always putting her family and well-being first. I admire and respect her very much.”

Longtime client **Usher** declares, “Sara plays an integral part of helping turn an artist’s vision into reality. Through her creative ideas, expert advice and her keen ability to tap into her varied resources, she has proven herself to be a undeniable force in helping artist’s achieve their goals.”

“Sara is a friend, a trusted confidant and an angel in our corner as we navigate our way through the entertainment world,” shares artist **Camila Cabello**. “We are so thankful she’s been such a strong presence on our journey.”

“She brings a real strength based on our passion and creative thinking, and she brings a very special and close relationship with the artists with whom she works—when you combine those things,

that’s a magical formula for success,” says attorney **Kenny Meiselas**. “She oversees artists’ needs from the perspective of a totality, and with her team she’s able to service all aspects of their careers.”

“Sara is a magician, if I had to sum it up,” says artist/actor and **OutKast** co-founder **Andre Benjamin**. “She is an idea-nurturer, a voice of truth and reason, and a therapist at times. She has great taste and actually gets it done. Whatever ‘it’ is. She will find the swiftest and best way to do it.”

“To me and many others, Sara is like a guardian angel,” offers **100 Management’s Luke Mitzman**. “She chooses her people carefully, because she cares for her clients in a deeply personal way and will commit to them on a level that is unparalleled. Sara is always three or four moves ahead of everyone else in the room and there’s no better feeling than having her in your corner. She’s simply the best.”

“Sara always brings great energy to any room or meeting,” observes manager **Tony Sal (The Weeknd)**. “I admire her passion and strategy. My clients and I consider her family.”

“I know that I’m biased,” says **Capitol Music Group COO Michelle Jubelirer**, “but Sara brings incredible and undeniable passion to her job, which is obvious whenever you hear her extolling the virtues of one of her clients. It’s always natural—never forced—and brutally honest (yes, we have that in common). That’s why she’s equally loved and respected by the talent she works with and the partners she has forged relationships with over decades in the business. She’s also strategic in her thinking and understands her business inside and out. It’s a powerful combination of attributes, and the result is Sara’s stellar career and her incredible value to the entire music business.”•

JUST US GALS: with Camila Cabello and lifelong pals Sarah Goldstein, Natasha Ferris and Nicola Tallarico

