



R A I N M A K E R S   T W O

# DAVID MASSEY

The Artist Whisperer



hen David Massey began his second tour of duty at **Sony Music** as President/CEO of the relaunched **Arista** label, he said it felt like “coming home.”

“Being in the building with all these people that I still love, it’s an incredible feeling,” he said in July 2018 during his first week in the new job.

Days earlier, **Clive Davis**, who founded Arista as an indie back in 1974, expressed his delight that Massey was carrying on the nameplate, hailing the British expat as “a true music man who has tremen-

dous respect for artistry, and he is the ideal choice to carry on the label’s great tradition.”

“It has exceeded my expectations,” Massey told *HITS* 10 months after taking the job. “I projected five or six signings in the first period. We have 20 artists, 15 of them direct signings in the U.S., and 21 people working here; it’s already a mini-major in a sense.

“I think, given my background, the heart of it is A&R. But I think I would describe it as an artist-development label. In an age where there



*Clockwise from top left: Massey and Lenny Waronker with Louise Goffin; Islanders Massey, Chris Blackwell and Darcus Beese; John Boullos, Massey and Ron Cerrito with Epic artist Jimmy Ray*

are questions about the role of a label, we found a lot of interest in the label and all sorts of artists willing to jump in with us, which has been incredible to see and very inspiring."

While it's too soon to know whether Massey will return Arista to prominence in its new incarnation, his track record speaks for itself. As a neophyte manager in 1982, he trusted his gut, convinced that

"Dance Hall Days" by the then-obscure band **Wang Chung** was a smash. When the track exploded after Geffen released it in 1984, Massey was 1 for 1. He's been scoring with remarkable consistency ever since.

# “DAVID IS A TRUE MUSIC MAN WHO HAS TREMENDOUS RESPECT FOR ARTISTRY, AND HE IS THE IDEAL CHOICE TO CARRY ON THE LABEL’S GREAT TRADITION.”

—CLIVE DAVIS

“David is a true artists’ man and one of the greatest music executives of our time” says Sony U.K. chief Jason Iley. “I’ve known him for over 20 years, and he’s had hits throughout those years. He’s enthusiastic, consistent, a prolific hitmaker and a genuinely decent human being who I’m proud to call a friend.”

Says veteran attorney Don Passman, “David is one of those rare people who is incredibly creative but also very smart about business in the sense that he runs a tight budget and a company well. He manages people well and is very conscious of the business side but is also able

to talk to creative people in a sincere and deep way.”

“I was surprised to learn,” Passman adds, “that he’s fluent in French and in some ways more comfortable in French than English, and often reads French books for fun.”

It appears there’s quite a bit that most of Massey’s fellow industry veterans don’t know about him.

One of Massey’s strengths is the chemistry he’s evidenced with artists of all stripes, paralleling the career of his mother, who’d dedicated herself to her management clients. Given that connection,

you’d assume that the music business is in his blood. How, then, do you process the fact that his twin brother Stephen is an investment banker? “He’s as much of a music fan as I am, but he started in finance early,” Massey clarified.

**T**he twins’ mother was Marion Massey, whose extraordinary career included discovering 14-year-old singer Lulu and managing the British siren and “it girl” from 1963 to 1989; Lulu is best-known for the double-platinum #1 smash “To Sir With Love” in 1967. One of the



Scottish alternative rockers Travis and team visit Michele Anthony, Polly Anthony and Massey at the Epic offices in 2001.



Doubling down: Stephen and David Massey with Good Charlotte's Joel and Benji Madden

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very few female managers on the ’60s pop scene, Marion had strong ties to Beatles manager Brian Epstein, Yardbirds/Led Zeppelin manager Peter Grant and Cynthia Lennon, John’s first wife, among other high-profile figures. She also managed—and married—songwriter Mark London, who penned “To Sir With Love” and other Lulu material. When Marion passed away in 2014, Lulu sang at her funeral.

“She was one of the two first female managers,” Massey pointed out in a 2016 *Billboard* interview. “And no, she didn’t get the credit she deserved—she did an amazing job, because Lulu could have had a three-year career—but she’s still got a career and it’s been 40 years. Mum wasn’t someone who sought the limelight. And it wasn’t an era where some managers now have a lot more prominence than they did back in the day. She was also really a hands-on mom: She had three kids. When she started, me and my twin were five, my sister was eight. She was always being offered other artists, but she had Lulu and my stepfather, and that was it. But she was very respected—if you talked to anyone of the generation that would remember her in London, everyone respected her. She got the respect she deserved, definitely.”

**M**assey’s early schooling was at the Lycée Français de Londres, followed by a master’s degree in law at Christ’s College Cambridge University, where he was also president of the Law Society.

While at Cambridge, he considered going into politics and ran for the Westminster City Council when he was 21. A desire to have his own business, paired with a desire to help a band he adored—Wang Chung—led to him taking a different path.

He married Gaby Gryn in 1987; they have two grown children, Adam and Clio, and the latter currently co-helms Arista publishing division Work of Art with her dad.

While handling Wang Chung and Tom Robinson, among others, Massey launched his own indie label/pubco,



*David and Clio ponder a Work of Art.*

**Big World.** He had a successful career and was enjoying himself. But then opportunity knocked.

Artist management—specifically in the way that he approached the job—was a logical gateway to A&R for Massey.

"When I was a manager back in the day," he tells *HITS*, "I was always involved in the A&R of my bands. My management company was A&R-driven in terms of our involvement, which is probably why I ended up doing A&R."

In the early '90s, when he and his wife were having their second child, Michele Anthony and Tommy Mottola reached out to him and offered him an A&R job in New York.

"It just felt right at that time to move from being a young manager with a good staff—I had a dozen people working for us—into the heart of the business, which

was at that time New York," he has shared. "It just felt like an opportunity to learn a huge amount around the age of 30 and absorb a whole new set of experiences, so I thought I'd stay a couple years, but it ended up being 15."

In 1993, two years into his first label gig, as VP A&R at Epic, Massey had another eureka moment when **Creation Records** head Alan McGee played him a tape by the little-known English band **Oasis**. "He came to see me in New York with the demo before he signed the band, and I fell in love with it," Massey recalled. "I had never heard a demo as strong as theirs was. So, Oasis became a Creation signing and a Sony act worldwide."

The group's second album, 1995's *(What's the Story) Morning Glory*, became a massive worldwide hit, giving Massey one of the highest highs of his

career. "I always passionately believed in the music of Oasis and in the songwriting ability of Noel Gallagher. That album sold nearly 14 million copies and it put the band in pole position on a worldwide basis, which was a dream come true at the time for all of us. It was an amazing moment, a combination of a great success story with a record that I personally absolutely loved."

His first A&R experience, however, was with a most unlikely signing, the supermodel **Naomi Campbell**. Mottola had signed her to Sony and handed her to Massey to make an album. Problem #1 was "every day that she wasn't modeling was a big payday she was missing."

The result was *Baby Woman*. "Actually, I enjoyed it," Massey has explained. "But I learned a lot from her about how to handle someone like that, and there



*Top: Phil McIntyre, Nick Jonas, Massey and Demi Lovato; bottom: with Jon Bon Jovi*

**“DAVID IS ONE OF THE MOST GLOBAL-MINDED RECORD EXECUTIVES IN THE BUSINESS. HIS A&R INSTINCTS ARE PHENOMENAL, HIS TRACK RECORD IS SECOND TO NONE AND HE’S STILL DEEP IN THE TRENCHES WITH EACH ARTIST.” —JODY GERSON**

were things in my experience with Liam [Gallagher], which did echo a little bit back to that, only in terms of how to approach someone who actually really didn’t want to do something.”

**M**assey was soon rewarded with his own imprint, **Daylight Records**, where he signed Good Charlotte, brought in **Phantom Planet** from Geffen and returned Cyndi Lauper to the Sony Music fold. He also gave the Jonas Brothers their first record contract. Actually, he initially only signed Nick Jonas.

“They thought Nick had an angel-like voice, which is what got him signed,” Joe Jonas told E! News. “He was working on that solo project and one day Kevin and I said, ‘Hey, Nick, do you think we can write a song together?’ We wrote ‘Please Be Mine,’ which was the first song we wrote together, and the fans loved it.

“We walked into the label one day and Dave Massey, Nick’s A&R guy, freaked out and said, ‘Whoa, there are brothers?’ From that moment, we immediately became a group project and started working with different people every day. It was just really great.”

“David has been an important piece of the Philymack family from the beginning, from signing Nick in the early Sony days to our starting a joint venture together,” says Jonas Brothers manager **Phil McIntyre**. “He is a true visionary and someone who continually raises the bar.”

Massey continued to move upward. In late 2000, his duties were expanded to include an A&R role for Sony Music International, which meant splitting his time between New York and London.

Eventually, he was upped to EVP, A&R, Sony Music Label Group U.S., and president, Daylight Records, and shed his connection with Epic. His role was to create and implement long-term A&R strategies for all Sony Music labels and identify international acts capable of breaking in the U.S.

“That was an amazing time for me,” he says. “In the global A&R role,

I knew every single A&R person at Sony in the world. We would have A&R meetings where we invited between 50 and 60 A&R executives to a location like Miami or New York or London three or four times a year to find ways to help artists in different countries and also create cross-collaborations with artists from different nationalities.”

One of those projects was developing **Shakira** as a bilingual artist, helping select producers and songwriting partners on her paired Spanish and English albums *Fijación Oral Vol. 1* and *Oral Fixation Vol. 2*, which included the hits “Hips Don’t Lie” and “La Tortura.”

“When I first met her, she couldn’t speak a word of English,” he says. “She’s one of the most ambitious people I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with. And when we did ‘Hips Don’t Lie,’ which was an amazing experience for me to be part of in an A&R capacity, it was incredible to see her determination to crack America—it was inspiring to watch.”

In 2007, after a seven-year run at Sony, L.A. Reid put Massey in charge of Mercury Records as a new division within the Island Def Jam Music Group; the label had been dormant for nine years. Reid hired Massey for having a “track record of trust and inspiration he has won from the artists he’s worked with over the years.”

At the time, his partners on the international side of IDJ were Lucian Grainge and Max Hole, and the label’s first signing was a Brit, **Duffy**, whose debut, *Rockferry*, would sell 6 million copies worldwide.

With the idea of being a boutique label dedicated to pop and rock acts, Massey quickly signed **Parachute**, **Portishead**, **Neon Trees**, **Taio Cruz** and **Gaslight Anthem**. Massey and his team did A&R for some Island artists, among them **The Killers**, **Fall Out Boy** and **The Airborne Toxic Event**.

He took the leadership of Island in 2013; a year later, a reorganization of UMG’s East Coast labels uncoupled Island from Def Jam and placed Massey atop a freestanding Island, which was moved under the **Republic** umbrella. Subsequently, he and his team saw the combination of his A&R and marketing



*Top to bottom: Sir Lucian, Shawn Mendes, Massey, manager Andrew Gertler and Mike Posner; with Tove Lo, Lovato and Eric Wong; being serenaded by Keke Palmer*



UMG's Michele Anthony and Boyd Muir with David, Nick and Shawn

**“I REMEMBER WALKING INTO DAVID’S OFFICE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME JUST FEELING COMFORTABLE. TO GO INTO A RECORD LABEL AND PLAY A SONG FOR A BUNCH OF PEOPLE AS A 15-YEAR-OLD WAS TERRIFYING, AND THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I FELT AT EASE IN FRONT OF SOMEONE OF HIS STATURE. WE CONNECTED IMMEDIATELY ON A CREATIVE AND PHILOSOPHICAL LEVEL.”** —SHAWN MENDES



savvy and the unparalleled promo chops of distributing label Republic produce stellar results. (Indeed, apart from Republic itself, Island was, and is, the only UMG-owned-and-operated label in the Republic-distributed family.)

At Island, Massey told *Billboard* in 2016, “I wanted to go back to the idea of Chris Blackwell-era Island: an artist-driven label that was a major, but in an intimate manner,” says Massey. “It’s been a great, great thing for our culture to be at this size.”

Island promptly notched a #1 album in Shawn Mendes’ *Handwritten*.

“Our dream scenario with Shawn was

to really develop his base and direct fan engagement and let the music speak—we could get him to #1 just based on true fan base, and then go to radio on the day the #1 was announced,” he told *HITS* after the record topped the album chart. “We were able to get past any ‘teen’ preconceptions about Shawn in terms of the music, a legitimate #1 album and being on tour with Taylor Swift. That’s been a real labor of love and a proper achievement for us.”

“David’s passion for the artist and music-making process runs deeper than it does with pretty much anyone I’ve

met,” says Andrew Gertler, Mendes’ manager. “It’s something I admire and have had the benefit of learning from. We would spend every single Friday for months at a time before the release of each Shawn album; we’d be in his office for hours into the late night, playing music, strategizing and plotting how we’d make sure not only that the songs were the best they could possibly be, but that the plan was bulletproof. His attention to detail is unparalleled, and I don’t know many people who put the amount of energy into their artists that he does.”

Adds Mendes, "I remember walking into David's office for the very first time just feeling comfortable. To go into a record label and play a song for a bunch of people as a 15-year-old was terrifying, and that was the first time I felt at ease in front of someone of his stature. We connected immediately on a creative and philosophical level."

Impressively, as the years rolled on, Massey achieved the lion's share of his Island successes with new artists. He asserted in 2018 that the successes of Mendes, who scored three #1 albums during Massey's run, and Demi Lovato were "really important to what I want Island to be known for, which is quality artists we helped develop."

**S**ony Music's Rob Stringer came calling in 2018 to see if he would be interested in reviving Arista Records, which had been shuttered seven years earlier. The new job provided Massey with an opportunity to branch out into an operation that would include management and publishing, as well as a label.

Once again, the challenge is to break new artists. They're currently launching the careers of, among others, Julian Lamadrid, Dennis Lloyd, Stephen Puth, Lithuanian DJ Dynoro and Smith & Thell.

Massey's philosophy at Arista seems unchanged from the description he gave [songwriteruniverse.com](http://songwriteruniverse.com) in 2015: "Artists need to be unique—I'm not someone

who is drawn to the generic. I'm also an artist guy who is committed to artist development and career-building.

"Over the years, I have learned to follow my instincts. You can learn a lot in this business from experience. I've learned to trust myself more—I don't deliberate. I try to make decisions naturally, listening carefully to both heart and mind."

Massey recently explained the basic differences between the Arista and Island operations. "We had a strategic alliance at Island with Republic that worked very well. At Arista, everything is in-house. It's a smaller, more self-contained team. Island's music was more pop-leaning. At this early stage, Arista is wider, with urban, hip-hop



*Top:* With Monte and Avery Lipman; with Clio; with Avicii

*Bottom:* Wong, Crush Music's Bob McLynn, Massey and Grainge with Fall Out Boy



Polly Anthony, manager Kelly Curtis, Michele Anthony, Pearl Jam's Jeff Ament, Dave Glew, Eddie Vedder and Massey present Doctors Without Borders' Mary Lightfine, Oxfam's Ray Offenheiser and CARE's Marilyn Gist a check for \$1 million, derived from sales of the 1999 benefit album No Boundaries.

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and alternative acts, but also pop artists. It feels more independent-minded in terms of our ability to operate.”

Massey’s focus in year one has been on the label, while Work of Art publishing and management (overseen by **Ryan Chisholm**) are getting up to speed. The publishing side had signed up seven writers as of May and management had four clients, among them **Mike Posner**, with whom Massey worked at Island.

One reason to have the three-pronged approach, Massey says, is “sometimes you meet an artist who might want to be managed, or they might want to be signed to the label or published, and I’m very familiar with all those disciplines. It’s very nice to be able to be involved on any level.

“In all cases, the artist’s drive is the key to the results. When I find an artist like

Shawn Mendes or Nick Jonas—when he was 10!—I always look for that drive. Beyond the charisma, you’ve got to have that drive and desire, and it makes a fundamental difference to what a guy like me does. What I can do is based on the artists wanting it as much as me.”

Massey is bullish on the early signs of success in streaming numbers for various acts, all of which have released music that he sees as an introduction to their music rather than singles being worked at radio.

Reviewing the roster underscores that Massey’s Arista is a global affair, which he says wasn’t intended. Lloyd is Israeli, Smith & Thell come from Sweden, and he notes they have an artist of Mexican descent who was brought up in Dubai. At presstime, they’re about to sign their first artist from India.

“It’s incredible how diverse it is,”

Massey says. “And it’s because the world has become what we hoped it would be, really global. We’re seeing it obviously so much now in the Spotify era. There’s truly a global attitude towards music. For someone like myself, having been focused on this throughout my career, it’s very exciting see and to become part of.”

“David is one of the most global-minded record executives in the business,” UMPG Chairman **Jody Gerson** concurs. “His A&R instincts are phenomenal, and his track record is second to none. David is wonderful at identifying international acts that can break in the U.S. and, conversely, has an uncanny ability to sign a U.S. artist who will have global success. And he’s still deep in the trenches with each artist. We’ve known each other a long time, I am happy to call him my friend.” ■