



The Jays



Jay Brown

NATION BUILDER

Roc Nation co-founder and CEO Jay Brown has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. He's part of Jay-Z's inner circle, along with longtime righthand man Tyran "Tata" Smith, Roc Nation COO Desiree Perez and her husband, Roc Nation Sports President "OG" Juan Perez. He's a dedicated supporter

of the arts, having joined the Hammer Museum's board of directors in 2018, as well as a champion of philanthropic causes. In short, this avid fisherman keeps reeling in the big ones. Brown is making his mark, indelibly and with a deep-seated sense of purpose.

"I think the legacy you create...is built on the people

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you help,” Brown told **CEO.com** in 2018. “It’s not in how much money you make or what you buy or anything like that. It’s about how many people you touch. It’s in how many jobs you help people get and how many dreams you help them achieve.”

By this definition, Brown’s legacy is alive not only in those he’s helped but in those *they’ve* helped.

The ripple effect he’s created became something of a wave in 2005, while Brown was working at **Def Jam Recordings**, which was then a division of the **L.A. Reid-led Island Def Jam**. That was the year a demo recorded by an unknown Barbadian teen landed on his desk. With one listen, he recalls, he became **Rihanna’s** champion. Brown played her demo for Jay-Z, whom Reid had recently appointed as Def Jam’s President/CEO, and Jay-Z set up an audition for Reid. After hearing her song

“Pon de Replay,” L.A. told Jay-Z not to let Rihanna leave the building until the contract was signed. Jay-Z and his team closed a seven-album deal, and since then, she’s sold nearly 25 million albums in the U.S. alone, while the biggest of her seven tours, 2013’s **Diamonds World Tour**, grossed nearly \$142 million on 90 dates. Her most recent foray, 2016’s 71-date **ANTI Tour**, grossed \$110 million.

Her superstardom enabled Rihanna to launch the **Clara Lionel Foundation** (named for her paternal grandparents), for which Brown serves as board secretary. The nonprofit supports education programs around the world, including the **Clara Lionel Foundation Global Scholarship Program**.

Brown could be viewed as part of **Quincy Jones’** legacy, having begun his music-industry career in 1993 at **Quincy Jones Music Publishing/Qwest Records**—whose roster then included **New Order**,

Tevin Campbell, The Winans, Patti Austin, Tamia, Tata Vega and Quincy himself—when he was 19. “He mentored me and taught me the business,” Brown says of Quincy. “He made sure if I was going to be in the business, I was going to learn every part of the business.”

During his five years at Qwest, Brown rose from Creative Director on the publishing side to VP, with responsibilities encompassing A&R and publishing. He joined **Elektra Records** in 1999 as SVP of A&R under then-Chairman/CEO **Sylvia Rhone**. During his half-decade-plus at the label, Elektra released music from **Missy Elliott, Tracy Chapman, Gerald Levert, Keith Sweat, Busta Rhymes** and **Yolanda Adams**, among many others.

Jay-Z lured Brown to Def Jam as EVP in 2005, initiating their synergistic business relationship and close friendship. Indeed, they’re simply referred to as “The Jays” by those who know them best.



Rihanna and Brown flank Calvin Harris at the 2014 Roc Nation Pre-Grammy brunch in Beverly Hills.

Connecticut-born, Brown moved to Southern California with his family when he was 10, later attending high school in the Los Angeles-area enclave of Granada Hills. Jay's Jamaican-born mother had wide-ranging tastes, and she and her friends played vinyl albums practically nonstop, exposing the youngster to music of various genres and eras.

Jay's mom was on him about getting his college degree, but he was intrigued by the music business, and soon after graduating from high school, he landed an internship at Mercury Records. At the time, Jay's older brother was a runner for *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and the show's production company, Quincy Jones/David Salzman Entertainment. He'd struck up a friendship with Judith Bright, who had joined Quincy Jones Productions as the assistant to the president (two years later she'd be running Quincy's publishing company), and Bright recommended Jay for a job at Qwest, so he put his higher education on hold and went to work at his first paying job.

Five years later, while he was working at Elektra, Rhone told Brown he'd never run a company until he had his business degree, so he enrolled for online courses at the University of Phoenix, earning a bachelor's in business in 2001, to the delight of his mom. Brown finds it amusing that no one has ever asked him if he has a degree.

Brown worked alongside Jay-Z at Def Jam from 2005 until 2008, as they presided over a loaded roster that included Hova, RiRi, Kanye West, Ne-Yo, Fabolous, The-Dream, Young Jeezy, Ghostface Killah, Ludacris, Rick Ross, Nas and LL Cool J. He says of his signature contribution there, "When I first met Rihanna, I knew that she was special. She was 16, but she was poised... You just knew that she was there. We didn't want her to be seen as a novelty. So as we put the first record out, we started on the second one. It was Jay-Z's idea originally. 'I think we should start making the first album, and we shouldn't stop.' We wanted people to know she's here to stay she's not going anywhere. And here we are, eight albums later."

In 2008, Brown and Jay-Z co-founded Roc Nation, signing a 10-year, \$150



With J. Cole at the 2014 Roc Nation pre-Grammy brunch



DJ Khaled and Sylvia Rhone pause from looking at their phones to pose with Brown.



Brown, Tata and Jay-Z at the 2014 Roc Nation Pre-Grammy brunch in Beverly Hills

million joint-venture deal with Michael Rapino's Live Nation. "I've turned into The Rolling Stones of hip-hop," Jay-Z quipped, marveling at the size of the windfall and the sheer scale of the historic partnership.

The agreement was renegotiated in 2017, as the two parties agreed on another 10-year deal, this one worth \$200 million, marking a watershed moment for both companies—and an extremely fruitful one at that. Brown and Jay-Z have grown Roc Nation into a sprawling and diverse operation, but the company's primary focus continues to be its star-studded, ever-growing artist roster. RN's current label and management clients include Rihanna, Kaskade, Meek Mill, Yo Gotti, J. Cole, Shakira, Big Sean, Lil Uzi Vert, DJ Khaled, Mustard, Vic Mensa, Mariah Carey, Robin Thicke and Grimes, as well as Jay-Z himself.

When the original deal went down, Brown took the CEO title and began to apply the knowledge he'd gained from working with Jones, Rhone and Reid. He was assuming oversight of a multifaceted

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entity, which at the time extended to label operations, music publishing and artist management. Roc Nation's initial distribution deal, with Sony Music, was struck in 2009.

More recently, Jay-Z launched the venture-capital fund Marcy Venture Partners, again partnering with Brown.

"Jay always knows how to influence you to be the best version of yourself," Brown says of Jay-Z. "He doesn't look at it as working relationship—it's a partnership, a family atmosphere—and it's a culture that can't be purchased."

In 2013, Roc Nation moved from Sony to UMG. In making the announcement, Lucian Grainge said, "In just five years, Roc Nation has established itself as one of the most successful brands in music, with a reputation for developing some of today's most influential and popular talent. Not only does this agreement provide a dynamic platform for Roc Nation's exciting emerging art-

ists, it extends our relationship with the extraordinary Rihanna and represents a homecoming for Jay-Z—a brilliant artist and entrepreneur, who has been a creative cornerstone of our company. All of us at UMG are thrilled that Jay and Roc Nation chose UMG as their partners, knowing we will support their artists with a level of resources, expertise and passion that is simply unmatched in the industry.”

“We are looking forward to working with Lucian and the incredible team he’s assembled at Universal,” said Jay-Z in his official statement. “We would like to applaud Lucian for collaborating with us to strike a new-age deal. This agreement presents a unique opportunity for Roc Nation’s artists—being able to continue to operate as an independent label with the strength, power and reach of the best major. I look forward to a long and prosperous collaboration with UMG. It feels good to be home.”

Jay-Z was referring to his years as an artist and executive at Def Jam, which had handled marketing and promotion for his Roc-A-Fella label since his second album, *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1*, in 1997, with Kanye among Roc-A-Fella’s signings. When Roc Nation’s deal with UMG was renegotiated, Rihanna became a Roc Nation artist, bringing her Westbury Road imprint with her, while J. Cole delivered his final album under the Sony deal before shifting to IGA along with his Dreamville imprint.

“Jay maintains incredible relationships with artists and executives by giving them great advice,” says Interscope’s Joie Manda. “He’s always thinking about the long-term strategy. He’s a silent killer.”

That same year, the company launched Roc Nation Sports, its athlete-management offshoot, further expanding Roc Nation’s pop-cultural footprint. The roster, overseen by RNS President Juan Perez, includes Kevin Durant, Todd Gurley, Juju Smith-Schuster, CC Sabathia, Robinson Cano, Ndamukong Suh, Saquon Barkley, Leonard Fournette, Melvin Ingram, Romelu Lukaku, Yoenis Cespedes, Jalen Rose, Justise Winslow, Willie Cauley-Stein, Wilson Chandler and Josh Hart. As for the synergy between the two management divisions, “Every athlete wants to be rapper, and every rap-

per wants to be an athlete,” Juan Perez pointed out to the *New York Post*.

A worldwide publishing joint venture with Warner/Chappell Music was also inaugurated in 2013.

“Although still a boutique firm...Roc Nation has quickly built a strong reputation for innovative and aggressive manage-

ment, in part because of the company’s president, Jay Brown,” *The New York Times* noted at the time.

Roc Nation diversified yet again in 2016, this time adding Latin and Nashville divisions. The latter spawned another Warner/Chappell partnership, the production company Rhythm House,

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Brown, Steve Bartels, Tata, Rihanna, Jay-Z and her grandfather Lionel backstage at Webster Hall in NYC after the final stop on RiRi’s 777 Tour in 2012



2 Chainz and Big Sean with the host at the 2019 Roc Nation Pre-Grammy brunch in L.A.

“JAY ALWAYS KNOWS HOW TO INFLUENCE YOU TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF. HE DOESN'T LOOK AT IT AS A WORKING RELATIONSHIP—IT'S A PARTNERSHIP, A FAMILY ATMOSPHERE—AND IT'S A CULTURE THAT CAN'T BE PURCHASED. LEGACY ISN'T ABOUT HOW MUCH MONEY ANYONE MAKES BUT ABOUT HOW MUCH WE HELP EVERYONE ELSE.” — JAY BROWN ON JAY-Z

presided over by songwriter/producer/DJ Jesse Frasure, known for a quartet of #1 hits with Thomas Rhett, among other chart-toppers.

That year—a particularly busy one for Brown—was also highlighted by an agreement with regular Roc Nation event producer ESM Productions, the signing of management client DJ Khaled and the release of Rihanna's eighth album, *ANTI*, her inaugural release on Westbury Road/Roc Nation.

“I heard about Jay Brown long before I met him,” recalls attorney Francois Mobasser of Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light, who has repped several Roc Nation clients over the years. “It struck me as

improbable, if not impossible, that he could live up to the hype. I was wrong. I left his office after about an hour or so marveling over the fact that this guy seemed to know management, A&R, publishing, business affairs, legal affairs, marketing and publicity with equal expertise and aplomb. It's rare, in my experience, that a manager can be more than one of those things, let alone all of them.

“Still, until I worked with him, I was skeptical that my hunches about him would prove accurate,” Mobasser continues. “Wrong again. Over the course of the next several years, we worked closely together on a high-profile client. All those skillsets came to bear both repeatedly and reliably, but, perhaps most impres-

sively, his predictions as to how particular circumstances would likely resolve themselves, as well as his recommendations as to the best way forward in light of them, proved right every single time. It was staggering, and often left me wondering, “What does he need me for?”

Brown's far-flung interests are reflected by his board memberships. In addition to the Clara Lionel Foundation, he holds a seat on the boards of the Hammer Museum and the cannabis retailer MedMen.

His philanthropic endeavors have been widely acknowledged. In 2011, he was honored at the 22nd HAL (Heroes and Legends) Awards Dinner & Scholarship Benefit, created to aid at-risk youth by Motown songwriter Janie Bradford

(“Money [That’s What I Want],” “Too Busy Thinking About My Baby”).

Above all, Brown is devoted to his family. “On the personal side of things, Jay and I have had children in the same grade at the same school for many years,” says Mobasser. “When we would discuss balancing work and home, he’d always say, ‘Family first.’ Based on the rigorous demands of his job and the untenable travel required by it, I was understandably dubious about whether he—or anyone, for that matter—could make good on that mantra. However, each time I looked around to see which parents were at the winter sing, back-to-school night or the opening ceremony of the school Olympics, Jay was there without fail, wearing the unmistakable smile of a proud parent. So, as impressive as he is as a businessperson, he is an even better father, and I think that says much more about him than anything on his long list of accomplishments. He’s in a class by himself and always will be.”

Brown brings that level of devotion to the artists he works with, whom he views as part of an extended family. “I don’t walk in their shoes... I don’t live their life. All I can do is help out...and try to lead them in the right direction,” he says with characteristic humility. Part of that is encouraging them to look within when deciding on a course of action. “As a company, you want to make sure you don’t take an artist out of who they are. The fans will know it. They know when something’s real and something’s fake.”

His commitment to forging a legacy of helping others can be seen in Roc Nation’s 2018 investment in **Promise**, a technology startup devoted to “decarceration.” The ideal of reducing the number of people behind bars by facilitating the freedom necessary to pursue dreams deferred comports with Brown’s reflections on the Roc Nation logo.

“Our logo is an airplane, because as kids, we all used to make paper airplanes and throw them, and we used to just dream,” he explains. “You didn’t know where you’d go, but you had a vision... Our logo reminds us to always keep dreaming, because dreams do come true.” ■

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UFC fighter Holly Holm and Brown in Vegas before the 2015 Miguel Cotto vs. Canelo Alvarez middleweight title fight