

# JENIFER MALLORY

Jenifer Mallory spent years in the Sony system prior to taking her present perch as EVP/GM of Ron Perry's Columbia. The well-liked exec has since proved an indispensable part of Perry's Big Red machine, with a strong reputation as an artist-friendly marketing wiz. The L.A. native's diverse background has given her a granular understanding of the marketplace; she also has considerable experience in international, and her global perspective has been vital as the label navigates the new ecosystem.

## Marketing As An Art Form



**Where did you grow up?**

In Los Angeles, on the West Side. I have two older brothers, and we were a big surfing family, always at the beach.

**You went to Cal. Was Berkeley a culture shock?**

I learned how to survive in a world where no one gives a shit about you as much as you do. How do you survive in a class of 30,000 people? How do you succeed? I found out that you have to advocate for yourself. But it was a beautiful experience. I loved just being let loose and trying to figure it all out. It was so different from the coddled private-school experience I had.

**So had you figured it all out by the time you left college and presumably entered the job market?**

When I graduated from college, I moved to London and ended up writing copy to sell toys on the Internet for a company called

INTERVIEW BY SIMON GLICKMAN



PHOTO: JOHN SCIULLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR SME

Mallory with Justin Eshak, Rob Stringer, Leon Bridges, Austin Jenkins, Jonathan Eshak and Ron Perry at Sony Music's 2019 post-Grammy shindig

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eToys, which was part of the IAC conglomerate. I had to figure out how to package the information and talk to the consumer, which I found really interesting. I made my way into marketing from there.

I continued to work for IAC when I came back to the U.S., but for CitySearch and Evite. The company bought Ticketmaster in 1998 and the online division merged with CitySearch. Ticketmaster was in the very early stages of working with companies like the NBA and Cirque de Soleil. The challenge was, how do we leverage the data we've acquired selling tickets? How do we go to these bigger companies and package marketing with the ticketing and distribution? We were basically figuring out how to upsell marketing capabilities to these bigger clients. We were creating this new model—essentially a marketing arm within ticketing—as the technology was taking off, which was really fun.

#### **What came after Ticketmaster?**

I knew I liked consumer interaction and brand marketing, and Sony Pictures was looking for a consultant to do *Spider-Man* marketing, so that was my way in the door at Sony. I was doing

digital marketing as mobile was coming into play. At the time it was Facebook and MySpace and the early days of how do you reach kids on the Internet?

But my real dream was the music side, so I moved from the film side to the music side by way of the *Spider-Man* soundtrack, which was on Epic. And I got to help blow the whole thing up. Everything had just gone down with Napster; everything had just been disrupted. So there was this drive to build out an Internet marketing team, a digital marketing team. We didn't necessarily know a ton about music, but we knew how to convert consumers. Samantha Saturn [now CMO at SESAC] was brought on to run the team. She gave me my chance, and I'll forever be indebted to her for letting me in the door.

So I've spent the last 15 years moving around at Sony Music Entertainment, starting in digital, then going into proper product management, then, in 2009, jumping to international on the Columbia side, running the Columbia team and ultimately working with Sylvia [Rhone] and Peter [Edge], then running international for all of Sony Music, reporting to Rob [Stringer], which was incredible. I got to travel the world and learn

the idiosyncrasies of the different markets. Of course today it's imperative to understand the global marketplace, so I'm extremely grateful that I was able to do that.

Then Ron [Perry] came in the door, and we really hit it off. We're a great team; we complement each other in a wonderful way. In 2018 he just said, "Let's do this together. Get off the road and come back and help me run Columbia."

#### **What would you say are the key attributes of the space Ron's created?**

I've never worked with anyone who has such an incredible understanding of the Internet, consumer behavior and where the marketplace is going. He has been way ahead of the curve, and I mean even before the pandemic, before everything shut down. So despite everything that was going on, we were in a wonderful position structurally to handle the fact that the Internet was the only thing we had to do our jobs with.

Couple that with an undeniably commercial ear. Ron's incredible at the music side—that's his superpower.

And the fact that, frankly, he hadn't worked at a major label before. He would look at things and say, "Well, why would we do it that way? Let's do this; this makes more sense." And I love that about him. He had no problem blowing things up, saying, "It doesn't matter that that's the way you always did it."

The fact that he came from SONGS, on the publishing side, where he was really close with his artists and very much at the

nucleus of the creative conversations, has allowed him to change the relationships we have with our artists in the best possible way. It's a very different energy—Ron's running a family operation.

#### **How has his outlook expanded your own understanding?**

Tremendously. I've learned so much from him. I've never worked for a CEO with such a deep understanding of youth culture—where the kids are consuming things, how trends start, how that impacts streaming... We use data to see when things are working and when things aren't working, and I had a good understanding of that going into it, but it's even better now. He's really raised the bar for me.

#### **Take me through the process of a campaign.**

Every campaign is different, obviously, but it's always led by the artist. It starts with us asking, "What does this album mean to you? What does this song mean to you?" And then we consider how do we build that out? How can we touch other parts of the culture to create the narrative, the world of this project? How do you get that world to come to life on the Internet so that it becomes part of the zeitgeist? Then it's what's the demo? Where do they live? How do we find them? Is it Twitch? Is it Fortnite? Is it Twitter? Is it Facebook? Is it by way of television or press? You have to be very methodical about where you're trying to find your consumer. And when you're working with an artist like Lil Nas X, so much of it comes from him.



Mallory and Team Columbia toast Adele's 25 triumph.

**He's kind of a next-level marketing executive.**

Ron and I joke about that all the time—if Montero ever decides to stop making music, he could just run the show. I swear he could do my job in a second. He gets the Internet more than any other artist I've come across.

**He seems to have an almost prodigy-level understanding of the dynamics. But a lot of artists these days appear to have a three-dimensional grasp of how to communicate with their audiences.** When we're talking about a Lil Nas X or a Harry Styles or a Tyler, The Creator, those artists know what they want, and we just help construct it.

Tyler may not necessarily think about every little pocket of the Internet, but with *Call Me When You Get Lost*, there was just so much to dig into. Same with Harry; *Fine Line* had such an incredibly beautiful narrative arc. Then you see something like the video for “Adore You,” which gave us so much to work with.

We did a bunch of really innovative, exciting things with Harry on the one-to-one marketing side that we'd never done before.

Daft Punk was like that, too. I'm thinking of the campaign for [2013's] *Random Access Memories*, which was hugely influential on me. The robots [frontmen Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter] are incredible marketers, with a really keen sense of what moves the culture, and they had a really strong vision for their campaigns. I learned a lot from them about thinking globally but marketing locally and making sure things feel authentic in each of the different marketplaces. Like this AC/DC campaign we did last year; we started it with snipes and billboards across from Angus Young's high school in Sydney.

But we're not always given the keys to the kingdom. There are developing artists who need a lot more from our creative team; the creative team has to tease everything out of them. It's much more difficult when an artist doesn't really have a vision for themselves yet.

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PHOTO: JOHN SCIULLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR SONY

Mallory with Rosalía, Ezra Koenig of Vampire Weekend and Ron Perry at Sony's 2020 post-Grammy party

### **There's still a certain amount of trial and error.**

The things you think are going to be huge sometimes aren't, or the opposite happens, like, wow, we didn't see *that* coming. We just have to be nimble and if it isn't working, don't force it. And if it is working, whether you expected it to or not, you lean in. Every Friday we say, "OK, what's going to work?" We have a good idea because we have the data and metrics that help us know what Friday is going to look like, but we can still be surprised by what we see, which is exhilarating.

### **TikTok has changed the center of gravity. Do you have a feeling where the next thing like that is coming from?**

We're always trying to study and learn, and we're always trying to see around the bend. We're interested in all the gaming platforms, for instance. That's not going to go away, because that's just how kids socialize now, at least the boys. You see them watching Twitch gamers, not even playing the game themselves. It's wild.

We did something really great with Nas X in [the gaming platform] Roblox to promote "Holiday." He did this incredible Black Santa character. He did a performance in the game; he was selling merch in the game and then we got a re-air. It happened two or three times that week. It was a tipping point for the campaign. It's kind of like the right synch in TV; if you get a great synch, it can change the lifespan of a song. If the artist makes sense for the gaming audience and the song is used in the game, it can be a huge driver. You have to play around in the space. We're working on something immersive right now with an artist who has a great album coming up, so stand by for that.

### **As you alluded to, the pandemic has accelerated the centrality of digital technology and the Internet in particular. What are some of the other things you've taken away from this very strange phase of our lives?**

We've seen just how important it is to make sure your people are OK. It's been so difficult to draw a line between work and the personal now. I sometimes feel like I work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that's not healthy, and it's certainly not a good way for the staff to feel.

In the beginning, it was really stressful. We thought, "Oh shit—it's all going to come to a screeching halt." But in the last 10 months or so we've sort of stabilized the new normal. We're putting a real emphasis on making sure people take mental-health days. Ron and I try to make sure people put parameters around the time they spend Zooming; in the last couple of weeks we haven't had any Zoom meetings because we could feel people needed a break. You have to encourage people to find that balance because Columbia is only as good as the people who work here. It's critical that they feel supported. My biggest job is making sure they can take the space and time they need to stay sane.

But I do miss being able to sit in a room with people and brainstorm. Doing that on Zoom just isn't the same. So I'd love



PHOTO: MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY

*Mallory with John Mayer*

for people to start coming in more as soon as that's a possibility because I do think that collaboration, especially in a creative business... I don't ever want this to be only remote.

### **Tell me something about your team.**

We have an incredible team. The senior staff and everyone on down do tremendous work. In particular, [EVP/Head of Promotion] Peter Gray has been a great addition—a true leader—working with [Sr. VP Promotion/Operations] Jim Burruss. The proof is in the charts and that everyone feels motivated and supported.

### **What do you like to do when you're not working?**

My son just turned three. He's a maniac, but he's wonderful. He was one when we went into lockdown, and it's been great having the opportunity to be around him so much and becoming a more capable and confident mother. Of course it's hard juggling everything. To stay sane my husband and I do nature, tree-hugging hippie stuff pretty much every weekend. We try to get in the car and go splash in a lake or go for a hike in Harriman State Park, see some animals. We want our son to have a balance of city and nature, which you have to work at in New York. But there are so many beautiful things outside the city that are pretty easy to get to. Now more than ever, it's important to have those adventures.■

**"The gatekeepers are the fans now, so we give them the campaign tools that will make them want to get involved; you have to arm your fans with the tools they need to spread the message."**