



# EQUAL ACCESS

ARTIST AND MANAGER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

*powered by mtheory*



# WHAT IS EQUAL ACCESS?



A year in the making and part of mtheory's commitment to diversity and inclusion, we launched the **Equal Access** program in April 2022 to give artists and talent managers from underrepresented demographics [Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+, and women] the resources, training, and networking opportunities they are not always afforded in **Country Music**.

The three key areas of development we focus on in Equal Access are:

- Build participant's network through exposure and access to key industry people;
- For the managers: training, mentorships, financial support through a stipend, and access to mtheory manager services
- For the artists: artist development through industry education and networking, plus funding for content creation

# APPROACH

mtheory will work intensively with the managers and artists for 12 months, running April - March, to help them build a development plan + goal timeline, and cultivate relationships in the country music industry that will put them in the best possible position to further their career and set them up for future success.

Each participant will be given at least \$25,000. For the artists, this can be used as a content fund, to be paid to vendors directly. For the managers, this will be paid out in mix of monthly installments and a fund to build their business.

Each cohort cycle includes monthly education and mentoring sessions with industry leaders. Artists and managers will also participate in weekly sessions internally to create bespoke individual plans.

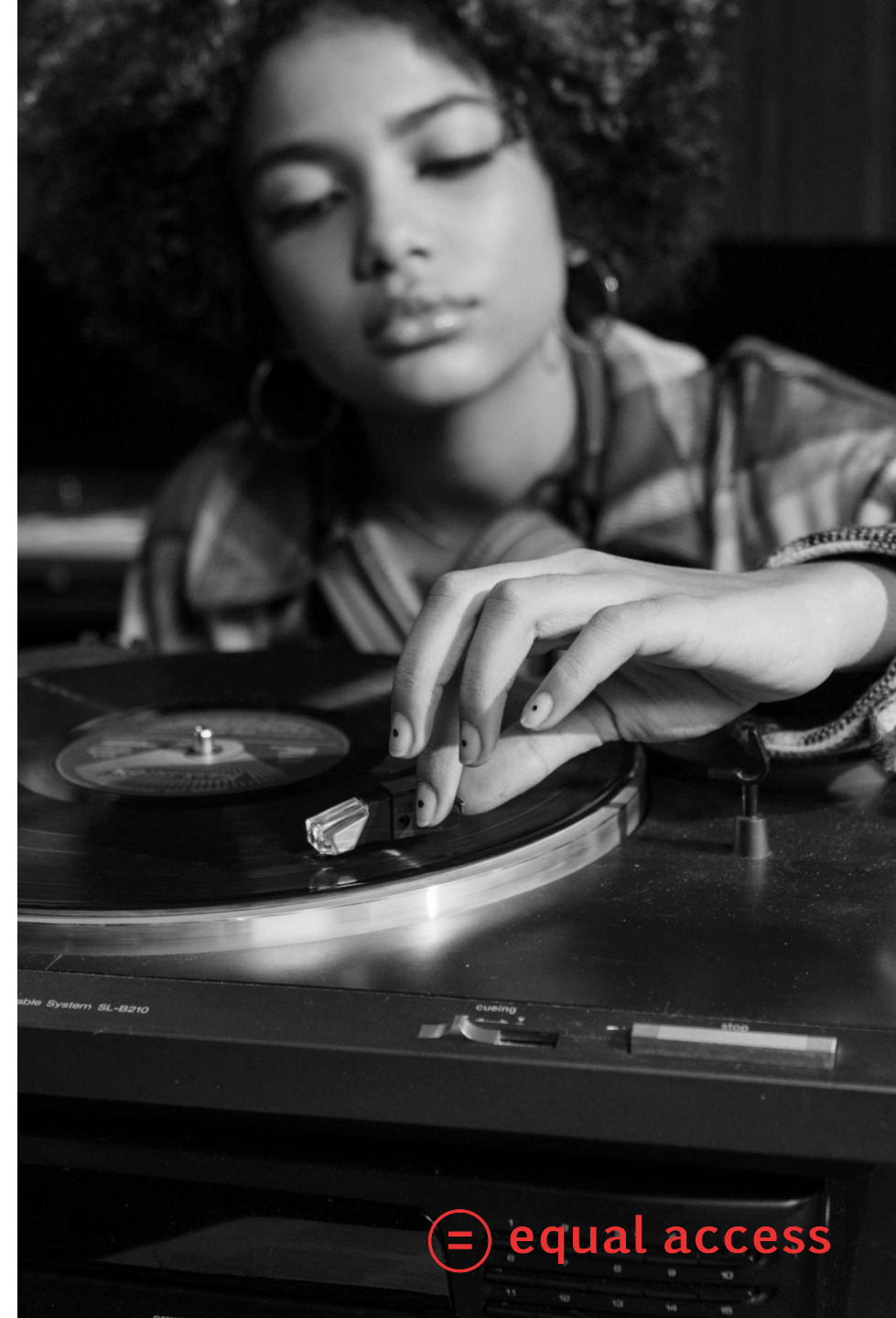
As we grow, the alumni network will also be part of the ongoing development of new classes of artists and managers with an expectation of a pay-it-forward mentality for future mentoring and networking.

# COHORT SELECTION

This program is designed to create access and training for underrepresented artists and managers in Country Music. Specifically Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+, and women. Artists and managers will be chosen by a panel of experts from mtheory, CMT, and other Nashville industry leaders based on application criterion.

3 artists and 3 managers will be selected each year to participate in the program. **The 2023-2024 cohort will be announced in April 2023.**

Artists and managers are in independent programs and do not need to be connected to each other. Artists may have teams and managers may have other artists already.





HOW CAN YOU HELP?



# SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**Financial  
Support**

**Resource  
Support**

**Network  
Support**

# FINANCIAL SUPPORT

## TITLE SPONSOR

\$100k +

CMT is the Title Sponsor for 2023-2024.

## ADVOCATE

\$50k +

Fully funds one participant's annual stipend, plus operational costs

## PARTNER

\$25k +

Allows one of our artist participants to record new music, or take their music on the road.

## SUPPORTER

\$10k +

Funds the branding development for each of our participants, plus covers some operating expenses

## FRIEND

\$5k +

Funds a networking event, allowing our cohort to meaningfully connect with industry insiders

*Each level will come with varying degrees of publicity and inclusion in our Equal Access marketing efforts.*

*Note that each year program year runs from April - March.*



# RESOURCE SUPPORT

## Performance Opportunities

- What stages can you put them on?
- What award shows can you include them in?

## Access to your industry specific marketing opportunities

- Playlists
- Newsletters
- Press
- Radio programs
- Sync opportunities

## Services donated in kind

- Designers to help build up branding for cohort.
- Studio time for recording
- Access to songwriters, producers, and audio engineers
- Photographer, videographer, and content creator services.

*These are meant to serve as examples, but are by no means an exhaustive list. We defer to you on the best ways your company's resources could be a benefit to our cohort.*



# NETWORK SUPPORT

- Host a mixer to introduce our cohort to your network
- Agree to be on or host an informational panel
- Meet with individual cohort participants to offer guidance
- If applicable, consider signing cohort participant(s) on as a client
- Work with your company to explore ways you can internally help diversify the country music industry
- Invite the cohort to your events

# The Inaugural Cohort

*In the first year of the program...*

Over 100 music industry connections made through meetings with partners such as CMT, BMI, RIAA, Warner Music Nashville, Universal Music Nashville, Spotify, Apple, Amazon Music, YouTube, Live Nation, Opry, CMA, and more!

Entire cohort walked the red carpet and attended the CMT & CMA Awards.

Recording Academy, Academy of Country Music, and Country Music Association memberships secured for the cohort.

Equal Access became a resource to country music industry tastemakers by sourcing and sharing diverse vendor leads through Nashville Directory.

*The following slides showcase the cohort's individual wins during the program.*



# Madeline Edwards

California born, Texas raised singer/songwriter Madeline Edwards has transcended musical boundaries, incorporating her jazz, soul, gospel and country influences into her unique sound "through vulnerability and passion" (NPR). Edwards performed on Lady Gaga's Born This Way Tribute Record with The Highwomen, NPR's Tiny Desk Concert, and earned opening slots for Jordin Sparks and Grammy award winner Raphael Saadiq. Edwards made her national television debut at the 2021 CMA Awards, where she sang with CMA nominee Mickey Guyton and Brittney Spencer.

2022 was the year everything took off for Edwards and she made her Grand Ole Opry debut, opened for Chris Stapleton's All American Road Show Tour, performed on Rissi Palmer's Color Me Country Stage at the Long Road Festival in the UK, was a CMA Fest showcasing artist, as well as an AmericanaFest showcasing artist, among many other stages. In June she released her self-titled debut EP, and her debut album *Crashlanded* released in November, which landed her deals with both Sony Music Publishing and Warner Music Nashville. The industry took note of her rising success, and she was named Spotify's Hot Country Artist To Watch list in 2022, CMT's Next Women Of Country 2022 Class, Billboard's Rookie Of The Month, as well as Apple Music's Riser Of The Month.

For 2023, Edwards has been named Amazon Music's Breakthrough Artists To Watch: Country Class, YouTube Black Voices Class of 2023, Pandora Artists to Watch for 2023, Entertainment Focus Breakthrough Artists and Ones To Watch in 2023 and Holler's 23 New Artists for 2023 list. She is currently opening for Ingrid Andress on The Good Person Tour.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT MADELINE EDWARDS](#)

# Miko Marks

Miko Marks was born in Flint, Michigan. After attending Grambling State University in North Louisiana, she moved to Nashville in 2005 with the intention of making it as a commercial country star. In Nashville, Marks earned spots at CMA Fest, and released two albums, 2005's *Freeway Bound* and 2007's *It Feels Good*. Ultimately though, she was met by an industry that wasn't ready for a Black Female Country Star, and Marks made the decision to move to California and raise her family.

In 2021, she decided to continue and work on her country music again, returning with her third album, *Our Country*. This album led to critical success, which set in motion all of the wonderful events of the past year.

In 2022, Marks was named one of CMT's "Next Women of Country", and released her 4th album, *Feel Like Going Home*. The album hit top 5 on the Americana Radio Chart, and the single "One More Night" hit top 20. From Rolling Stone's "25 Best Country & Americana Albums of 2022" to NPR's "Best Roots Music of 2022" list, *Feel Like Going Home* made it on almost a dozen end of year "Best Of" lists. She had two music videos premiere with CMT and shown on their Times Square Billboard. On the touring side, Marks made her Grand Ol' Opry debut, performed in the UK at Long Road Festival, was an AmericanaFest showcasing artist, a CMA Fest showcasing artist, opened for Tedeschi Trucks, Little Feat, and played many other stages throughout the year.

In 2023, Marks returned to the UK to perform at their AmericanaFest Award Show, and is currently gearing up for her co-headline tour with Rissi Palmer.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT MIKO MARKS](#)





# Valerie Ponzio

Since being catapulted into the spotlight by her showstopping turn on *The Voice*, Valerie Ponzio has made it her mission to shatter every precedent set for Latin artists in the world of country music. Hailing from El Paso, Texas, Ponzio has become a pioneer for a new wave of inclusivity in Nashville. She set her sights high and has both the voice and songwriting chops to stay her course. Her song “Little Obsessed” was described by *The Washington Post* as a song “everyone should know”, Maroon 5 frontman Adam Levine called her “the most well-rounded singer...that I think I've ever heard”, and *Rolling Stone* has enthusiastically praised her as “Channeling Dolly Parton and Janis Joplin.”

In 2022 Ponzio has continued to take to stages across the globe from Rissi Palmer’s Color Me Country Stage at the Long Road Festival in the UK, to Nashville based showcases such as Musicians Corner, Young Music City Rooftop Series, Whisky Jam, Opry Community Day and more. Ponzio also joined the Song Suffragettes and became a member of the Academy of Country Music and the Recording Academy.

Dedicated to blending Latin sounds with country music’s traditions, backed up by indomitable vocals, Ponzio is that rarest of things: something brand new in Music City. Ponzio released her Debut EP *Frontera* in 2022 and Music videos for her singles “Just a Bordertown” and “Desert Rain” premiered on CMT and in Times Square. Recently, her single “Desert Rain” crossed 1 million streams on Apple Music.

[\*\*LEARN MORE ABOUT VALERIE PONZIO\*\*](#)

## MEET OUR MANAGERS

# Charlene Bryant

A Canton, Ohio native, Charlene Bryant holds a Business Administration degree in Music Business from Belmont University. Bryant's educational background and years of experience working for the largest record labels, helped her establish a great understanding of both the needs of artists and the ever-changing landscape of the industry. In 2018 she launched her own management company, Riveter Management. Bryant was named to Billboard's Hip-Hop and R&B Power Player List in 2020 and 2021. Being in an industry that can be transactional and fast-paced, Bryant brings balance with her business acumen, results-oriented strategies, and value for authentic industry relationships. "From Righteous, to Ratchet to Wranglers." Bryant is excited to bring her knowledge from working in the gospel and hip hop world to the country music industry.

Just this past year Bryant joined the Universal Music Group Nashville team as an artist development consultant, signed country artist Harper Grae, and made multiple panel and public speaking appearances including the Music Managers forum, Music Business Association NY:LON and 2023 South by Southwest. Bryant believes in empowering songwriters and producers and says, "Songwriters and producers are the backbone of the music industry as a whole, but in country, they are the soul too."

[LEARN MORE ABOUT RIVETER MANAGEMENT](#)



# Kadeem Phillips

After seeing a need for producer management in his hometown Memphis, TN. Kadeem founded PowerHouse Management a full service management company overseeing a roster including producers and artists such as Hitkidd, TurnMeUpYC, Real Red, Raemi, Mic Carr, Chuck Indigo and Clay “Kruical” Perry III.

Through his work in management Phillips has successfully challenged the music industry over its authority to limit diversity in many of its core financial pockets.

While a part of the inaugural cohort Phillips created the Spirit of Country Showcase highlighting country artists of color and delivered the keynote at the 2023 Music Business Association NY:LON conference in the UK. In addition to signing more country artists, Phillips is zealous about creating safe and inspiring communities for people of color within country music.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT EMPOWER THE BLOCK](#)



## MEET OUR MANAGERS

# Marques Vance

Born and raised in Memphis, TN, Marques Vance has vast experience working in the music industry which has allowed him to obtain a great level of understanding for both music marketing and artist development.

Vance has created and implemented digital strategies for a wide range of artists and producers such as Kirk Franklin, Marvin Sapp, TayKeith, DOE, Koryn Hawthorne, KB and many others.

Vance holds a Bachelor of Science in Music Business and a minor in Marketing from Middle Tennessee State University. Driven by artist success, Vance takes pride in implementing the best creative marketing strategies to ensure ultimate artist brand awareness.

As a part of the inaugural cohort Vance has launched his company's website, moved to New York City to serve as a Digital Marketing Manager for Island Records and has been inducted as an ACM and Recording Academy Member.

Vance's goal is to cultivate today's country music marketing, bringing it's foundation, rooted in Black art and storytelling, to the forefront.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT RED CLOUD MEDIA GROUP](#)



Top row,, left to right:  
Denitia, Alex Evelyn,  
Angie K. Bottom row,  
left to right: Ahsaki  
LaFrance Chachere,  
Roberto Martinez,  
Camille Parker.



**AND WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED!**

MEET THE 2023- 2024 COHORT



@equalaccessmusic



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[www.equalaccessmusic.com](http://www.equalaccessmusic.com)



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