



Journal of the
Music & Entertainment Industry
Educators Association

Volume 23, Number 1
(2023)

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Published with Support
from



Uniting an Industry: *Billboard's* International Music Industry Conferences, 1969-1985

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<https://doi.org/10.25101/23.2>

Abstract

Billboard's International Music Industry Conference (IMIC) was where tough industry topics such as piracy were tackled, where technology debuted, where networking thrived, and where significant business deals were made. IMIC changed the traditional rules; decision-makers openly met to plan for the future as a united and collective industry. The conference immediately proved its significance; the Universal Numbering Systems Action Committee (UNSAC) was formed to pursue a universal numbering system for the recording industry at the first conference. The second conference began the process that ultimately led to the 1971 Geneva Convention against phonogram piracy. During its sixteen-year span—and thirteen conferences—IMIC brought a global industry together. A lack of finances ultimately led to its demise.

Keywords: *Billboard*, Music, International, Music Conference, Lee Zhitto, IMIC

In 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first man on the moon and David Bowie's "Space Oddity" climbed the music charts. John Lennon and Yoko Ono recorded "Give Peace a Chance;" the Beatles released their *Abbey Road* album and gave their last public performance. Another British band, the Rolling Stones, dropped the *Let It Bleed* album with its iconic cake cover art. The Woodstock music festival drew 400,000 attendees and featured thirty-two performance acts.

This was also the year *Billboard*—often referred to as the bible of the music industry—held its first International Music Industry Conference

(IMIC). The conference was quickly considered one of the music industry's premier events and the publication proudly proclaimed that "almost every conference featured the debut of something new."¹ The conference took a forward-thinking approach to not only music but to advancements in competing technologies. It was where tough industry topics such as piracy were tackled, where new technology debuted, where networking thrived, and where significant business deals were made. For example, the 1970 conference began the process that ultimately led to the 1971 Geneva Convention against phonogram piracy.²

Billboard praised the influence of IMIC, proclaiming, "Very few times has a meeting taken place that caught the eyes of so many influentials at one time. In the past, the policy has been to keep top level meetings under wraps."³ IMIC changed the traditional rules; decision-makers openly met to plan for the future as a united and collective industry. During its sixteen-year span—and thirteen conferences—IMIC brought a global industry together.

Scant research has examined *Billboard's* ascendancy as a prominent business publication for the broadcasting, music, and entertainment industries. Most academic research focuses on the impact of *Billboard's* music charts for identifying culturally and socially popular music. Most encyclopedia entries about *Billboard* are brief. Furthermore, despite its significance and impact on the international music industry, academic research has not investigated *Billboard's* IMIC. These conferences have received passing mentions, mostly related to technology debuts.⁴ But they provided a neutral ground for competing executives to share their concerns about the industry, to preview new technology impacting recording companies and home consumers, and provided a platform to discuss music piracy. Their history and the accompanying timeline of the changing music industry warrant exploration and analysis.

This study is based on the Lee Zhito collection at the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University. Zhito's *Billboard* career included roles as editor-in-chief, publisher, and executive vice president. He established *Billboard's* Conference Division as a separate cost center and spearheaded IMIC. The archive shows not only the significance of IMIC, but also how hard Zhito and *Billboard* worked to unite industry leaders.

Billboard's History, Entering the Conference Market

Billboard dates back to November 1, 1894.⁵ It began as *Billboard Advertising* and covered the billposting industry. In 1897, the name changed to *The Billboard*, and the focus expanded to include circus, vaudeville, and outdoor amusement activities. When the movie industry began, *Billboard* covered it, and in the 1920s added radio coverage. The popularity of the jukebox in the 1940s and the growth of music-dominated radio in the 1950s led to *Billboard's* music industry metamorphosis; the publication quickly became an invaluable resource for the music industry.⁶

While music industry charts made *Billboard* famous, it did not publish its first chart until the January 4, 1936 issue. The first national music chart polling retailers on record sales appeared in the July 27, 1940 issue.⁷ By the mid-1940s, the relationship between records and radio had been firmly established and *Billboard* focused its music coverage on radio jockeys, jukebox operators, and record dealers. In the 1950s, television was added. Its increase in TV coverage occurred at the same time the Top 40 radio programming format began.

In 1961, *The Billboard* changed its name to *Billboard Music Week*. In 1963, Lee Zhito was named *Billboard's* editor-in-chief, and the name changed again, this time to *Billboard*. In 1966, the magazine ventured into organizing conferences with The *Billboard* Tape Cartridge Conference, initiated to establish and unite industry leadership, something ultimately beneficial to *Billboard*.⁸ In 1968, with Zhito as associate publisher, *Billboard* held its second conference—a Radio Programming Forum—bringing together radio disc jockeys and program directors.⁹ The success of these two conferences led *Billboard* in 1969 to launch its premium global conference—the International Music Industry Conference. The event was a natural next step. Zhito said IMIC provided the industry “a place where the decision makers of this highly volatile, ever-changing business could gather from the far corners of the world, exchange their views on key issues, and together explore the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.”¹⁰

Billboard touted the first conference as “an event of historic significance for every executive in the music industry,” with an objective of providing an exchange of ideas and discussion of new concepts to help expand the music business.¹¹ IMIC was open to anyone with a stake in the music industry.

The first IMIC was co-sponsored with *Billboard's* equivalent in the United Kingdom—*Record Retailer* (later named *Music Week*). *Billboard*

brought in its own people from all over the world to assist and almost sixty top industry leaders were speakers. As Zhito put it, “Money was no object in making this a successful event.”¹²

As soon as the agenda was published, a heavy flow of registrations began. Well ahead of the event—held in April 1969 at Paradise Island Hotel and Villas in Nassau, Bahamas—the event hotel and overflow hotel were fully booked, forcing *Billboard* to line up a travel agent to assist with accommodations.¹³ The inaugural event had over six hundred registered attendees.¹⁴

For \$150, participants could attend all sessions. The opening event was chaired by Glenn Wallichs, CEO of Capitol Industries and co-founder of Capitol Records. Conference-goers were treated to several special events, including a preview of “Music Scene,” a series based on *Billboard*’s music charts airing on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) that fall.¹⁵ Attendees included Frank Zappa, Tom Smothers, George Martin, and Phil Ramone.¹⁶

The conference quickly proved its significance; the Universal Numbering Systems Action Committee (UNSAC) was formed to pursue a common numbering system for the recording industry to track from manufacturers to retail distributors. This was a significant industry move because at the time there were a multitude of systems in use, resulting in mix-ups and general chaos when tracking products.¹⁷

Billboard went all out covering the first IMIC. Its May 10, 1969 issue contained twenty-six pages devoted to the conference, with articles and photos of each session. Zhito stated the conference “result was electric. *Billboard* was immediately embraced as THE international voice of the music/record industry.”¹⁸ *Billboard* even published a hardcover book of the IMIC speeches for all attendees. Titled *The Complete Report of the First International Music Industry Conference*, the volume paid homage to the conference registrants and provided fifty-eight chapters reflecting the topics at IMIC. Jukeboxes and radio were discussed, along with performers and performance rights, and new technologies included more than just cartridges and cassettes; the conference and book included satellite distribution and cable television.¹⁹ These sessions and the accompanying book supported the forward-thinking view of Zhito and the International Music Industry Conference planners.

First European IMIC, Spain

The instant success spurred *Billboard* to continue and IMIC 2 was held at the Congress Palace of Palma de Mallorca, Spain. Because the Nassau event had drawn a seventy-five percent U.S. representation, the European location was expected to draw heavier international participation. This proved correct. Close to nine hundred people from twenty-six countries attended.²⁰ It was evident early on that IMIC 2 was going to be large as preconference registrations filled up seven hotels. Late registrations could not be accepted unless attendees provided proof of their own accommodations.

At the conference, held in April 1970, one of the heavy discussion points was the video cartridge. Representatives from Sony, Philips, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) showed their systems and a keynote panel addressed ramifications the video cartridge had on existing music industry contracts. RCA, together with Motorola, unveiled their Quadraphonic 8-Track Tape System set to officially debut at the end of the year. In total, IMIC had seventy-five speakers, with speeches simultaneously translated into multiple languages.²¹ Attendees were treated to four world-firsts: an important antipiracy stand by all manufacturers, the unveiling of the Philips video cassette, the Quad-8 system demonstration by RCA and Motorola, and a demonstration of Victor of Japan's new video cartridge recording system.

IMIC 2 further reiterated the importance of the event; the most historically significant result was the passing of the International Antipiracy Resolution, leading to the framing of the 1971 Geneva Convention.²² Stephen Stewart, director general of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), proclaimed it normally would take up to ten years from idea to action so "to have made such rapid progress is little short of sensational."²³ In addition, the Council for International Recognition of Music Rights (CIRMR) was formed with the purpose of opening dialogue between the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, and the Western nations to increase the use of each other's music. *Billboard* called it "a natural and spontaneous outgrowth of IMIC."²⁴

This IMIC also resulted in a new *Billboard* division—the Music Industry Code Agency—to serve as the central registration agency for the new universal product numbering system. The system had been developed by UNSAC after the inaugural IMIC and meant each recorded product would now have a unique, ten-digit standard number, eliminating confu-

sion and duplication because of the previous global multitude of numbering systems.²⁵

The third IMIC—in Montreux, Switzerland, in June 1971—was expected to draw over 1,200 attendees. The conference format changed slightly; sessions were only conducted in the morning to allow for meetings and intra-company seminars in the afternoon. Essentially, networking was now prominently built into the conference agenda. There were two different types of meetings: conference sessions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and seminars on Tuesday and Thursday, with plenary sessions simultaneously translated to English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish.

Billboard had learned its hotel lesson. Five hotels were pre-booked, and by May, three were full.²⁶ Early bird registration was \$210, with those registering later paying \$25 more. The registration covered the opening cocktail party, a closing dinner dance, as well as all sessions and work material. IMIC 3 yielded a new group of attendees—spouses of executives. Because about 250 wives had come to Spain the year prior, tours were added to entertain the wives while their husbands attended workshops. It would be several more years before *Billboard* and attendees would recognize female executives in specific IMIC sessions.

IMIC 3 saw the world premiere of the CBS four-channel disk and Columbia Records showed its quadrasonic disk that was slated to reach the market that year. Beyond the technology rollouts, IMIC 3 proved a great space to network. For example, the conference provided the first world meeting for personal managers; they met to discuss establishing their own European conference. A twenty-page report of the conference, complete with keynote speeches and photos, was published in the July 10, 1971 *Billboard* issue.²⁷

Personal Invitation Leads Conference to Mexico

At the Swiss conference, it was announced that IMIC 4 would be in Acapulco, Mexico, in late April and into early May 1972. The location was chosen after *Billboard* received personal invitations from Mexico's former president, Miguel Alemán, who now headed the national tourism agency, and Mexico's record manufacturers' association president, Guillermo Infante.²⁸

To help attendees get to IMIC, *Billboard* now provided a special "Group Inclusive Tour" offer with flights from Boston, Los Angeles, Chi-

icago, Detroit, Nashville, New York, Toronto, Montreal, and London.²⁹ Essentially, networking and deal making could begin as early as the plane ride to IMIC.

The registration fee was \$240, but *Billboard* added a lower fee—\$125—to encourage young, middle management executives under thirty to attend. In addition, while women could pay the full fee to attend, a \$40 registration was available that included all activities except conference sessions. This move resulted in more wives attending the conference than in prior years. Furthermore, while 50 percent of the participants were from the U.S., *Billboard* touted that participants came from every Latin American and European country. A larger group attended from Asia, or as *Billboard* referenced their location, “the Far East.”³⁰ The event drew more from Latin America and Japan than prior conferences, and over seven hundred people attended IMIC 4.³¹

This event had an IMIC first—an industry exhibit area—added because of growing requests. Companies bought exhibit space—eight feet deep by ten feet wide for \$800 each—and set up in a special area of the conference hotel. The fee included an IMIC registration.³² Companies displaying their wares included RCA, Panasonic, Motorola, and Sony.³³

It was initially announced that plenary sessions would be translated into French, Spanish, and Japanese, but English and Italian were later added. Furthermore, translations now covered all IMIC sessions.³⁴ There were nineteen seminars. One major draw was a seminar on young music buyers that included a country-by-country analysis showing record sales to youth under nineteen and those between twenty and twenty-five.³⁵ While this would be considered a standard market segment presentation today, it was eye-opening at the time. Another highly touted session was the art of deal-making as complexities permeated the music industry, especially internationally. The session not only reviewed the status of deal-making, but also taught attendees valuable negotiation skills.³⁶

Naturally, IMIC 4 included world unveilings. For example, RCA showed its compatible, discrete four-channel disk. IMIC was also quickly becoming the conference for music business group meetings. In Acapulco, the Light Music Division of the International Publishers Association held a meeting. Discussions about piracy and the International Antipiracy Resolution that had been signed by all manufacturers at IMIC 2 intensified. This time, record companies and trade unions were encouraged to share

the agreement with their national governments. As usual, *Billboard* followed up IMIC 4 with a full report.³⁷

After Acapulco, *Billboard* went radio silent in communicating the next IMIC. The conference had been held early each year, but it was not until its February 24, 1973 issue that *Billboard* commented on IMIC 5. The publication stated it had surveyed Acapulco participants and most felt the conference had covered the major pressing industry issues. This feedback led the publication to decide it was better to schedule IMIC every other year. *Billboard* announced plans for a panel of industry leaders to advise with conference planning. This International Advisory Committee for IMIC 5 ended up with eighty-one members from around the globe. Because IMIC 5 was to be held in the United Kingdom, a smaller, fifteen-person U.K. advisory group met in February 1974 to discuss the program, concluding that the first day would focus on Europe, the second day on North and South America, and the third day on the Far East, Australia, and other territories.³⁸

IMIC Heads Back to Europe

IMIC 5 was held in London, at the Grosvenor House Hotel in Mayfair in May 1974, a change from the resort settings in previous years. Registration was \$200 for early bird and \$220 for regular. There was a special wives category; they could register for \$68.75. Later the registration language for that category expanded to include wives and husbands. In addition, a special reduced fee was added for attendees under thirty. IMIC's five official airline carriers spanned the globe—American Airlines, Pan American World Airways, Air India, South Africa Airways, and Olympic Airways. *Billboard* teamed with Trafalgar Tours to provide participants with special vacation packages scheduled around IMIC.³⁹

Leading up to the conference, *Billboard* beat the IMIC publicity drum hard, both in terms of advertisements and articles.⁴⁰ Mort Nasatir, then *Billboard*'s vice president of international operations, called the London meeting “one of the most important music industry events ever to be held in the U.K.”⁴¹ Hugh Jenkins, the British minister for the arts, was set to speak on opening day, along with John Fruin, Polydor's managing director. The second day, Goddard Lieberman, the president of CBS Records, was the keynote. There were intensive seminars on significant industry issues each afternoon.

As with prior IMICs, companies held separate meetings. MCA Records conducted its international licensees meeting and RCA Records held a meeting to discuss its quadrasonic progress. Lee Armstrong, MCA's vice president of international operations stated it made sense to meet at IMIC because many executives would be there anyway.

Breaking from its tradition of publishing a full report on IMIC a couple issues after the event, *Billboard* added coverage to their May 18 issue, the first issue after the conference. *Billboard's* cover proudly boasted "500 Attend IMIC-5 In London," a figure later revised to 600.⁴² Articles outlined divergent opinions; Lieberman felt the music industry was moving away from the songwriter and artist being the same person, Fruin discussed how record companies needed to develop executives with an international orientation, and Jenkins asked if the music industry was doing enough to explore new artists and new music. The IMIC coverage continued in the May 25 issue, with photospreads and articles in multiple sections of the magazine. William D. Littleford, then *Billboard's* president, announced there would be an IMIC 6 the following year, with place and time to be determined.

Billboard's internal records showed London attendees had come from twenty-nine countries.⁴³ U.K. registrations accounted for the bulk of registration income, with the U.S. coming in second.⁴⁴ In total, the conference had 461 paid registrants, but over 190 additional registrations were complimentary to *Billboard* staff and correspondents, other media personnel, various speakers, and special guests. In mid-July, the first profit and loss statement for IMIC 5 was compiled. It showed a net loss of \$4,437 once expenses and income had been tallied. That was a \$40,000 income shortfall from initial projection, but *Billboard's* Nasatir said overall a good job had been done with cost control.⁴⁵ Attached to Nasatir's financial report was an IMIC recap. It stated the program had been successful, mainly because of what he called an overall lack of complaints. The main complaints were that the event was just too much; it was impossible to attend all sessions due to the concurrent schedule and some panels had too many panelists.

First IMIC on American Soil

Despite Littleford's statement in *Billboard*, there was no IMIC in 1975. The January 3, 1976 issue of *Billboard* featured an IMIC 6 advertisement—the first IMIC on American soil—in Hawaii. The ad took up

prime space on pages two and three. Early bird registration was \$225 with the regular fee being \$250. Spouses were \$75 for all social activities.

Lee Zhitto, now *Billboard's* publisher, boasted about the IMIC 6 international advisory board; it included executives from Sweden, the U.K., Mexico, Canada, Brazil, and Japan. *Billboard* lined up a special U.S. advisory board. These boards helped shape conference topics and board member names were prominently used in IMIC advertisements to attract attendees.

IMIC 6 took place at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel on Honolulu's Waikiki Beach in May 1976. A month prior, registration and initial projections showed representatives from fifteen countries and 500 to 600 attendees.⁴⁶ *Billboard's* profit goal was \$15,000; the staff had been conservative in their estimates of only 400 paid attendees.⁴⁷ Ultimately, these conservative estimates were correct as 400 attended, representing nineteen countries.⁴⁸ This IMIC was organized by *Billboard*, together with the U.K.'s *Music Week* (formerly *Record Retailer*) and Japan's *Music Labo*.⁴⁹

For the first time, IMIC had non-industry speakers—world-renowned in their field—as plenary speakers. The first day economist John Kenneth Galbraith spoke about the international economy.⁵⁰ The event used industry outsiders for panel discussions. One session featured international bankers discussing how to conduct business globally in light of monetary devaluations and inflation. In stark contrast to the beauty and warmth of Hawaii, the industry was dealing with the cold, harsh reality of inflation, currency devaluation, and rapidly increasing business costs, topics that overshadowed the conference. This did not stop Lewis Horwitz, senior vice president of the First Los Angeles Bank, to proclaim that the music industry was the safest and most profitable of all entertainment industries.⁵¹

Another first included an all-female panel focusing on women in the industry—with speakers from the U.S., Australia, and Japan—showing women were making inroads in the predominantly male music industry. The panelists argued women were an untapped resource, previously only visible in artist relations and publicity, but now spreading to positions across the industry, including executive positions.⁵² IMIC 6—for the first time—attracted participation from a then communist market. A session titled “Doing Business with Soviet Russia” featured Alexander Lebedev, the head of the Russian copyright society. Concurrent sessions were videotaped so participants did not miss anything.⁵³

At the closing banquet, publisher Lee Zhito announced that not only was IMIC back on an annual basis, but also that IMIC 7 would take place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He said, "A greater frequency is demanded for the key leaders of each industry to meet for an airing of mutual problems and the unified pursuit of solution."⁵⁴ Zhito identified IMIC as a vital industry summit and this time *Billboard* featured articles from IMIC only two days after the event started. As a practical matter for *Billboard*, the conference provided ready-made editorial content and an advertising sales event for the magazine, an important consideration at a time of consumer inflation and change in both the music industry and magazine publishing field. The coverage continued in the following issue, with a full twelve-page report on May 29.

To further elevate the significance of IMIC, the 1976 year-end issue announced that *Billboard's* Trendsetter Awards would be presented in Amsterdam. Normally the awards—given for unique or innovative industry accomplishments—were celebrated at a special January event.⁵⁵ The awards were now to be handed out at the closing banquet. IMIC would host a country music show, including artists Ronnie Milsap and Tammy Wynette, thanks to the Country Music Association.⁵⁶ IMIC had featured artists previously, but this was to be the largest such show, and it was to be broadcast on Dutch television.

The initial Amsterdam advertisement was published in the first issue of 1977. It declared IMIC to be held in May, with the Okura Hotel as headquarters and the Amsterdam Hilton as the overflow. The ad revealed a fairly significant increase in registration fees—early bird was \$300, regular registration was \$400, and spouse registration was \$150. While *Billboard* called it a spouse registration in advertisements, in editorials they still generally referred to it as a registration for wives.

This IMIC marked a subtle name change; *Billboard* called the event IMIC '77 instead of IMIC 7. In an internal memorandum, Zhito and Nasatir stated this was a way to "build upon the annual aspect of the event rather than the number we have held."⁵⁷

In January, EMI's Sir John Read was announced as keynote speaker.⁵⁸ Others who were approached to be keynotes included U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. *Billboard* offered him a \$5,000 honorarium, transportation, and all expenses paid for him and his wife. Kissinger turned down the engagement, citing a schedule conflict.⁵⁹ He was invited to speak the following year, but that also failed to materialize.

Billboard once again teamed up with the U.K.'s *Music Week* and Japan's *Music Labo*. A *Billboard* article boasted that IMIC '77 "promises to be the biggest and most heavily attended to date," based on preregistrations.⁶⁰ However, that proved incorrect again, as about four hundred attended.⁶¹

Largely because of the overall success of IMIC, leading up to the 1977 conference Zhito proposed a new profit center for *Billboard*—an Industry Conference Bureau division.⁶² He felt they could earn larger profits by bringing conferences in-house, instead of using an outsider to help organize logistics. Thus, *Billboard's* conference division was born and quickly began putting on multiple conferences a year.⁶³

IMIC Gets Its Own Dutch Tulip

With an event held in Amsterdam, it is only fitting that IMIC '77 received an official conference flower, its own Dutch Tulip—a special rose tulip commissioned by Ariola Benelux. The Amsterdam event featured seventeen sessions with the main topics being a predicted sales increase and continued piracy concerns. The atmosphere was more optimistic than in Hawaii, although experiences showed the industry was not recession-proof.⁶⁴ IMIC '77 featured a look at the Philips video disk player with the consumer launch later that year, and the Sony Betamax video cassette recorder/player made its European debut. In addition, music publishers took steps to form a new international organization.

While *Billboard* had published articles about IMIC '77 leading up to it and during the event, it was not until a month after the event they published a full report. Of note was that they did not make an IMIC '78 announcement. Advertisements for IMIC '78 did not appear until January, which was late considering the event was taking place in Venice, Italy in May. Early bird rates were now \$350, regular registration \$450, and spouses could register for \$175. As was now standard, an advisory board was appointed to help with the schedule. Once again, Zhito proclaimed this IMIC was going to "be the biggest and best of all in terms of attendance and program interest."⁶⁵ However, the publication's own estimates showed they again anticipated about four hundred attendees.⁶⁶

Because *Billboard* now had its own conference bureau, and because IMIC required so many employees in attendance, new accounting procedures were incorporated. Each *Billboard* attendee's travel and entertainment expenses were charged directly to their expense account, thus

helping make IMIC financially viable.⁶⁷ The initial budget for the event pointed to a profit of over \$23,000.⁶⁸ It was clear *Billboard* was looking for ways to make money on IMIC.

The publication initially scored a coup with Italy's Premier Giulio Andreotti scheduled as opening keynote, the first time a head of state would speak at the event. Government officials had attended in Spain, the Bahamas, the U.K., and Mexico, but never the head of a country. *Billboard* wrote that "Andreotti's appearance at IMIC underlines the importance of the event as an international summit meeting for music and record industry executives meeting to discuss problems of the global industry."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Andreotti canceled when Aldo Moro, a former prime minister and, at the time, president of Italy's relative majority party, was kidnapped and later found dead. Italy's minister of tourism and arts spoke instead, promising Italy would take a stronger legal stance against piracy.

Combating music piracy in the 1970s included not only fighting consumer analog copies made through home recordings, but also addressing distribution of illegally made and marketed recordings and promoting the awareness of forthcoming technology that would further facilitate music piracy. These were hot topics for the music industry and those discussions would dominate the first page of *Billboard's* nine-page IMIC special. Conference attendees voted to support a resolution to increase funding to fight piracy. Other topics included the use of computer technology and how to improve trade relations between East and West. One of the most controversial sessions, however, was a future of industry executives panel. When the discussion started to veer toward women executive growth, sparks flew. The female panelists felt there were not enough women to promote to executives because of the industry's traditional gender roles. In reporting about the panel, *Billboard* called it "perhaps the most controversial session of IMIC 1978."⁷⁰ Panelists argued more had to be done to prepare women for career success.

Deal-making and Vodka Drinking

One of the more colorful IMIC '78 comments came from music publisher Ron White, participating on a panel about business in Eastern Europe. He proclaimed his deal in the Soviet Union not only took two years to finalize, but "necessitated a certain amount of vodka drinking at 10 in the morning."⁷¹ Other interesting elements included artist panelists like

classical pianist Artur Schnabel, violin virtuoso Isaac Stern, and contemporary jazz pianist Herbie Hancock.

Several organizations used IMIC '78 for meetings including the United European Publishers "Common Market" Group, the International Federation of Popular Music Publishers' executive committee, and Vogue Records of Paris. Léon Cabat, Vogue Records' president, said "IMIC brings the industry together and so we are using it as a base for carrying on important business at the company level."⁷² Vogue was announcing annual sales awards at IMIC.

The importance of IMIC seemed apparent to group attendees with internal meetings held by individual companies, global awareness and exchange, and the focus on content piracy. Face-to-face interactions mattered, even as the cost and complexity of the conference expanded each year. *Billboard* continued its European tour for IMIC '79, this time in Monte Carlo. The regular registration fee was now \$300 more than when the conference began ten years earlier. Advertisements show the early bird at \$375, regular registration at \$450, and spouses at \$200. When *Billboard's* IMIC advisory board met that January, it became clear that piracy was still the largest industry concern; it became the number one issue at IMIC '79.

This *Billboard* event appeared on track to succeed, as long as *Billboard* devoted the time and attention to market it through the internal conference division and editorial content in magazine issues. But breaking from previous years, there were fewer articles leading up to the event, essentially radio silence—besides a couple of advertisements—until the May 5 issue when a small write-up appeared on the front page and continued inside the publication. The main issues for IMIC '79 were piracy, home taping, corporate mergers, and emerging markets. *Billboard* tried unsuccessfully to line up an all-star charity gala with Frank Sinatra to coincide with IMIC, with invitations extended to Prince Rainier and Princess Grace.⁷³

For the ninth IMIC, the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) general manager for radio, Aubrey Singer, was the keynote. He spoke about the emergence of digital disks, copyright, and piracy—areas where BBC's concerns overlapped the recording industry's.⁷⁴ Piracy remained hot as declining sales and piracy affected the industry's bottom line. *Billboard's* Eliot Tiegel compared piracy to cancer.⁷⁵ Ron Wetherington, an FBI supervisory special agent, revealed that the U.S. record industry was losing over \$350 million a year because of piracy.⁷⁶

The conference mood, and especially the panel featuring record company presidents, was described by *Billboard's* Gerry Wood as “sobering”.⁷⁷ The substantial softening of the recording industry was taking a toll. Manufacturers of new video and audio equipment were urged to standardize equipment or the result would lead to massive consumer confusion, industry chaos, and a continued financial decline. The industry gloom showed in IMIC’s attendance; about 350 people from fifteen nations attended. In July, *Billboard* devoted ten pages to IMIC.

One music genre that was highlighted—and a conference bright spot—was country music. In Europe, country generally had not received the same attention as other genres. However, in 1979, it was clear country was making strong inroads. A decade prior, country music had been virtually non-existent in Europe.⁷⁸

Politicians, the White House, and the Music Industry Converge

The January 12, 1980 *Billboard* prominently featured information about the tenth IMIC and its advisory panel. The location was Washington, D.C., so that, as *Billboard* put it, attendees were within earshot of U.S. lawmakers. It was the first time IMIC was held in the continental United States. The early bird fee was \$450, regular registration \$550, and spouses were \$225.

A March issue of *Billboard* had the bold headline “White House Briefs IMIC” and declared a U.S. government briefing on economic issues would take place as a part of the conference. The briefing—to be held in the executive building where the president held his press conferences—had limited space, so only two hundred were allowed. *Billboard* proclaimed, “This year’s event, because of governmental involvement, is now seen as the most important IMIC to date and should provide fertile ground for industry leaders to discuss the challenges of all aspects of the entertainment business during the 1980s.”⁷⁹ The briefing turned out to be interesting indeed. Speakers such as Madeleine Albright—then a National Security Council member and later the first female U.S. Secretary of State—spoke to IMIC attendees at the same time as Operation Eagle Claw took place. Eagle Claw was the failed attempt to end a hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Iran, resulting in eight deaths.⁸⁰

In addition to the big White House session, IMIC featured speeches from James T. McIntyre, Jr., the director of the Office of Management

and Budget, and Alan Cranston, a California senator. McIntyre delivered a grave message about expecting the economy to slow down. Cranston discussed the economy but focused on the entertainment links in California.⁸¹ Another prominent speaker was Herbert S. Schlosser, RCA's executive vice president, who identified new communications channels emerging in the 1980s, and asserted the video disk was the one that would affect the entertainment industry the most. In Schlosser's opinion, it was going to "be the most significant consumer electronics development since color television."⁸² He naturally took the opportunity to plug RCA's VideoDisc system. Schlosser ended his speech by urging attendees to look beyond music, saying the horizon "can be as broad as entertainment itself."⁸³

CBS President John D. Backe identified the recording industry as "unquestionably at the dawn of a new day. A day of soundwaves becoming digits and motion pictures becoming phonograph records. A day when that what used to be called blue sky technologies are right over our heads."⁸⁴ Backe acknowledged increased competition in all areas of entertainment. Coen Solleveld, PolyGram's president who had also spoken at the first IMIC, said he "was struck by the fact that the same generic issues which we faced then are still very much with us today. We may be sadder these days in the music business but apparently not very much wiser."⁸⁵ But Solleveld added, "there will always be music."⁸⁶

And there was music. A special Wayne Newton show featured his Las Vegas revue. It was open to the public, but IMIC attendees had special seating.⁸⁷ Barbara Mandrell performed as a part of the opening festivities.⁸⁸ IMIC topics included a session called "Home Taping: Cancer or Scapegoat?" And like previous years, companies and industry associations held meetings in conjunction with IMIC. For example, the Country Music Association held its quarterly meeting.

The 1980 IMIC drew a bit over three hundred attendees.⁸⁹ *Billboard's* financial statements showed an estimated conference income of over \$30,000.⁹⁰ IMIC 1980 was highlighted in the May 24 issue with coverage spanning fourteen pages.

The eleventh IMIC meant a return to Europe, this time to Berlin, West Germany. IMIC '81 coincided with other recording industry events, including the German Phono-Akademie Awards and an international music market seminar for record dealers. As many as one thousand people were expected in Berlin for various music industry events, something *Billboard* hoped to capitalize on. Keynote requests went to prominent speak-

ers including U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy.⁹¹ Kennedy did not attend, but *Billboard* was able to provide participants with a letter from Karl Carstens, the president of West Germany, welcoming IMIC participants.⁹² Perhaps a cost saving measure, IMIC '81 had no traditional keynote speakers.⁹³

This IMIC had an early bird rate of \$500, a regular registration of \$600, and spouses were \$275. The event was at the Bristol Hotel Kempinski, but three other hotels were also lined up. *Billboard's* financials showed an \$11,500 profit.⁹⁴

The advisory committee's topics included video rights, satellite and cable, music markets in developing countries, artists and record promotion, and a survey of new music. Updates on piracy and home taping were also agenda items. New technology was having a clear impact on the music and recording industry. As *Billboard's* Zhito stated, "The primary problem is that each of the different entertainment media are vying for the same consumer's time."⁹⁵ But it was not only consumer's time that attendees were concerned about. It was clear video rights were, as *Billboard* referred to them, a minefield. The rights were different depending on each country's legislation. Copyright and who owned the right to what in terms of video, cable, and satellite were the main issues of interest, overlapping several sessions. New technology had made things both exciting and scary.⁹⁶

For the next conference, IMIC '82, *Billboard* distributed ballots for location voting, with choices of Greece, Austria, Malta, Canada, and Switzerland.⁹⁷ Greece was the winner; the conference took place in Athens in April. Early bird registration was \$500, with regular registration \$100 more. Spouses were \$275. The conference theme was "The Challenge of Change." *Billboard* launched a new young executives program; the publication split registration fees for up to three of a company's young executives to attend for the first time.⁹⁸

Keynote speakers were back and included Dick Asher, deputy vice president and chief operating officer for CBS Records, and Jan D. Timmer, Polygram's vice president of operations. Agenda topics included the threat of record rentals, the growth of home taping, and intellectual property rights.⁹⁹ Asher opened IMIC with a positive tone, assuring attendees that the record industry was due for a miraculous recovery. He said, "We are forgetting the place music has always had in people's lives and making the totally unsupportable assumption that it will, or could, cease to be important."¹⁰⁰ Asher urged the industry to add more creative excitement. IMIC '82 also included concurrent roundtable discussions, allowing key

issues to be analyzed by smaller groups. The roundtable findings were reported to the general assembly.¹⁰¹

Billboard featured a six-page IMIC spotlight in the June 5, 1982 issue. One frequent problem with *Billboard*'s coverage of IMIC was that full reports would sometimes run more than a month after the actual event. For IMIC '82, *Billboard* had been scooped on its own conference by *Music Week* with event coverage out on May 9. As Zhito put it, *Music Week* gave the event "a healthy plug but nevertheless from a news standpoint, beating us by a full month and thereby stealing our thunder."¹⁰² Notably, *Billboard* did not release IMIC '82 attendance numbers.

The next IMIC—the thirteenth—was held at the Alvor Praia Hotel in Algarve, Portugal, in May 1983. It touted a broad agenda spanning the entire entertainment spectrum, a move designed to draw more attendees. This IMIC was advertised with the slogan "1983—The Turn Around Year." Early registration was now \$575 with regular registration \$675. Breaking from the norm, spouses were free and the young executives' fee was only \$300.¹⁰³

Reception for First Time Attendees Added

One novel event for the Portugal conference was a First Timer's Reception to introduce new attendees to industry leaders. Many found out about this new event directly via a personal invitation from Zhito, *Billboard*'s publisher. As a way to increase the conference anticipation and participation, Zhito sent regular letters to previous attendees, telling them about conference developments, before details were published in *Billboard*; they heard it from Zhito first, a point that was emphasized in those letters.¹⁰⁴

The keynote draw was Televisa's President Emilio Azcárraga discussing the home entertainment industry and opportunities in satellite communications.¹⁰⁵ PolyGram's President Jan Timmer predicted CD sales would match LP sales by 1989, while *Billboard*'s Zhito called 1983 the year of the CD.¹⁰⁶ Other hot topics included new technology's impact on rights, television being a friend or foe, the rental market dilemma, and Africa as an emerging market.

Externally, *Billboard* was as positive as ever about IMIC. However, internally a battle was brewing as it was clear to management that IMIC was on a downward slope. The repetition of the conference eliminated some of its appeal and the economic affluence of the music industry was

diminishing. Correspondence showed grave concerns. In a memo to Tom Noonan, Zhito quoted Noonan as having stated, “I’m really now getting quite concerned about the state of IMIC this year.” Zhito’s response was that “if you who run IMIC—and are in a position to know—are that concerned, I’m worried sick.”¹⁰⁷ Zhito added that “if you are getting negative ‘vibes’—and I’ve learned to trust your vibes—then I urge that we drop this year’s conference and concentrate our efforts on other, more rewarding projects.”¹⁰⁸ Serious discussions about canceling occurred. Ultimately, a fear of ire from those with travel plans resulted in IMIC ’83 moving forward.¹⁰⁹

The 1983 conference suffered gravely from low attendance. It was mainly U.S. attendee numbers that declined, dropping more than fifty percent from the prior year. However, overall attendance figures showed only 129 total registrants and the conference was \$25,000 in the red.¹¹⁰ *Billboard* had issues with a late finalizing of the agenda, keynotes, and panelists. There was a lack of IMIC preview in *Billboard* issues. The magazine’s International Editorial Director Mike Hennessey called it “totally inadequate previewing,” adding that, “we must blow our own trumpet in the magazine and elsewhere and not undersell the Conference.”¹¹¹ All of this contributed to the lack of attendance.

Despite IMIC losing money and suffering low attendance, *Billboard* moved ahead with planning another conference. The ’84 IMIC was to take place in Killarney, Ireland in May. The theme was “Harnessing the New Delivery Systems.” *Billboard*’s coverage of its own event was not much better this year. Hennessey lamented how, “once again we are way behind schedule in terms of running stories and house ads in the magazine.”¹¹²

For Ireland, registration costs increased; the early bird was now \$600, with regular registration \$100 more. Spouses were free. *Billboard* added a category called “corporate registration.” That meant that if a company had several employees attending, the fees were \$450 for early bird and \$550 for regular registration. One of the early discussion points was Irish companies not being able to afford the hefty registration fee, and with an event in Ireland, it was important to have them represented. However, magazine staff were concerned if they lowered the fee for Irish companies, it would set a precedent for future conferences.¹¹³

Billboard touted topics such as the future of trade, the role of independent labels, and the continued impact of the CD. Turner Broadcasting’s President Ted Turner received an invitation to keynote the event.¹¹⁴

Opening remarks were to be given by Ted Nealon, Irish minister of state for culture. Another keynote speaker was to be William Agee, chairman and chief operating officer of Semper Industries.¹¹⁵ However, in a miniscule two-paragraph announcement on May 5—merely days prior to the event—*Billboard* announced the cancellation of the conference “due to an unusually high number of late cancellations among registrants.”¹¹⁶ Attendance had eroded to the point where the conference could no longer achieve its objectives.¹¹⁷ *Billboard* staff had quietly informed registered attendees about the cancellation before the article was published.¹¹⁸

What was to be the last IMIC took place in 1985, once again in Europe and in West Germany, but in Munich this time. *Billboard* asked several people to write commentaries on items to be discussed at IMIC to create event excitement.¹¹⁹ For the first time, a live feed of the conference was provided, thanks to European satellite channel Music Box. The live signal was relayed to monitors in the hotel lobby and the conference hall for attendee viewing.¹²⁰

IMIC '85 ran in tandem with the tenth Congress of the International Copyright Society (INTERGU). The two conferences held a joint session and the IMIC registration covered both events. Registration was \$550, with spouses free. There was a corporate fee of \$450 for companies with three or more attendees. Sessions were translated into German, French, English, Spanish, and Russian.¹²¹

Keynote speaker and Chrysalis Chairman, Chris Wright, blasted an unhealthy trend toward oligarchy in the industry.¹²² IMIC '85 ultimately resulted in a resolution calling for governments to recognize the importance of the creative copyright industries. The resolution came out of the joint IMIC and INTERGU panel.¹²³ The regular Trendsetter Awards were replaced by a special IMIC award, given to Bob Geldof and Ken Kragen for their efforts to combat African famine. However, Geldof and Kragen did not attend.¹²⁴

The Munich conference became the last IMIC as the event died a silent death. There was no mention of IMIC in *Billboard* in the next two years. The last mention is a photo of Zhito presenting Ken Kragen with his award in the December 7, 1985 issue.¹²⁵ That year is also the last year in Zhito's archival collection with an IMIC folder. The Munich IMIC's theme had been “The New Horizons: New Profit Opportunities.”¹²⁶ It was ironic considering this was the last IMIC, although in some ways strangely

fitting since *Billboard* was now clearly looking beyond IMIC for new horizons and new profit opportunities.

Concluding Thoughts

Billboard launched IMIC with a big industry bang and the conferences impacted music business practices, technology launches, and global business, but that impact diminished as music industry and global circumstances changed faster than IMIC could adapt. IMIC slowly faded away. Patrick Hurley, vice president for CBS International, called IMIC “a showcase for our industry,” while Zhito proclaimed, “We have always been proud of the fact that IMIC has been used by the world’s leading manufacturers as a launching pad of new concepts in our field.”¹²⁷ Rodney Burbeck, editor for *Music Week*, described IMIC as “one of the few occasions during the year that enables the industry to get together on neutral ground to discuss mutual problems.”¹²⁸

The music industry retrenched until it could reinvent itself, but *Billboard*’s IMIC could not find the formula for reinvention. In the best years, the conference added both revenue and publication legitimacy to *Billboard* as a leading voice in the music industry. It is notable that a media outlet united an industry and, in several ways, changed working practices. *Billboard* went beyond its focus as solely a trade magazine. For sixteen years, *Billboard* provided a global conference platform for industry competitors to meet, network, and unite around important topics such as a universal numbering system and piracy. *Billboard* was uniquely able to unite the industry it covered as a publication.

Zhito referred to IMIC as “the summit meeting of the music and home entertainment industry, attracting the top industry leaders from around the world.”¹²⁹ Yet, *Billboard* ended IMIC for several reasons. Zhito acknowledged that as a conference, IMIC “is the most difficult and unwieldy to organize and mount... this is due to the broad scope of the subject material treated, and the geographic spread from which participants and registrants must be drawn.”¹³⁰ IMIC was an opportunity for *Billboard* to cover its event with editorial content and advertising sales, but *Billboard* too played a part in IMIC’s demise by not publicizing it properly. What killed IMIC was a lack of enthusiasm within *Billboard* and among attendees; attendance dropped as a direct response to the financial softening of the industry. For *Billboard*, IMIC became a venture that cost more money than it was bringing in. Financially, the conference no longer made sense.

A&M's European Managing Director, Marcus Bicknell, wrote to Zhito, "The apparent drop in attendance rate over the last few years is very disappointing to me personally and is demotivating for those important executives attending."¹³¹ In Zhito's words, it was "not the registration fee but the airfare that makes IMIC the kind of luxury that only the top execs of a company are free to attend."¹³² With a recession hitting the industry hard, IMIC became a luxury few could afford. Ultimately, as Zhito declared, the success of IMIC had been in the participants' hands; *Billboard* merely provided the forum.¹³³

Endnotes

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128. Letter from Rodney Burbeck to Lee Zhito, May 17, 1983, Box 6, folder 9, LZC.
129. Lee Zhito letter to Jack Valenti (President, Motion Picture Association of America), February 20, 1985, Box 6, folder 8, LZC.
130. Lee Zhito letter to Fred Gaines (Wyman, Bautzer, Rothman & Kuchel), May 21, 1976, Box 6, folder 6, LZC.
131. Letter from Marcus Bicknell to Lee Zhito, June 15, 1982, Box 6, folder 10, LZC.
132. Inter-Office memo from Lee Zhito to Tom Noonan, October 11, 1982, Box 6, folder 10, LZC.
133. Letter from Lee Zhito to IMIC 6 participants, 1976, Box 6, folder 6, LZC.

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Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212 U.S.A.
www.meiea.org

The *MEIEA Journal* (ISSN: 1559-7334)
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