

TEEN TITAN

The man who made Justin Bieber.

BY LIZZIE WIDDICOMBE

When Scooter Braun, the manager of Justin Bieber and a stable of other pop stars, was growing up, his favorite comic-book hero was Superman. "I liked everything he stood for," Braun, who is thirty-one, told me recently. He liked that Superman had been created by two Jewish men, which made him "the Jewish superhero." Braun played basketball, and he dreamed of one day joining the supermen of the N.B.A.—the Magic Johnsons and the Michael Jordans. When it became clear that he didn't have the talent to play professionally, he began to think about the entertainment industry. But there, too, not all lanes were open to him.

"Justin Bieber was born with the Superman powers," Braun said. "He could sing, he could dance, he could play instruments. I wasn't born with those gifts, so I had to become a different kind of superhero." Braun studied the careers of influential behind-the-scenes guys, especially David Geffen, who moved from the William Morris mailroom to the music business and eventually co-founded DreamWorks. "David Geffen was a Bruce Wayne to me," Braun said. "He was extraordinary, but at the same time his talents were something that I could dream of and could fathom. I'm a normal Joe. But, with a lot of effort, I've got a shot at being Bruce Wayne."

Braun, a former Atlanta party promoter, has become the central figure in the current teen-pop explosion. Teen-age girls, and even some parents, recognize him as the college dropout who discovered Bieber on YouTube and then shepherded him to worldwide stardom. For the past three years, Bieber, with his soulful voice, silky hair, and hip-hop vocabulary ("swag, swag, swag"), has occupied the spot once held by Justin Timberlake and Elvis Presley, singing blue-eyed soul to

the screaming tween masses. Infatuation with him is often described as Bieber Fever.

Bieber is the only superstar to have emerged from YouTube so far, and, as he pushes his new album, "Believe," his online power and off-line marketability are seamlessly intertwined. His YouTube channel is approaching three billion views, and on Twitter, where he acquires a new follower every other second, a single tweet from him can mobilize his supporters to perform stunning feats: sell out Madison Square Garden in seconds, conjure a horde of three hundred thousand tweens in Mexico City, induce fans to buy a hundred and twenty million dollars' worth of perfume (Bieber's fragrance, *Somebody*), or influence the conversation about world events—in March, Bieber's tweets brought attention to the campaign to apprehend the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony.

The speed and scale of Bieber's success have tended to make Braun seem like a lottery winner: a lucky schmoe who hit it big. This perception bothers Braun. "I look to the shit talkers to find out what I have to do next," he told me. After hearing that someone had called him a one-hit wonder, he said, "I decided, I'm not just gonna break one new act, I'm going to break *two* more." He took on the management of a British boy band called the Wanted, and he signed Carly Rae Jepsen, a Canadian singer, to his label, Schoolboy Records. Bieber had brought Jepsen to Braun's attention after he heard her song "Call Me Maybe" on Canadian radio. This summer, with Braun's encouragement, Bieber made a video of himself and some teen celebrity pals prancing around to the song, which was leaked to YouTube; the song shot to No. 1 on the U.S. singles charts, and has spawned hundreds of other YouTube tributes.



Scooter Braun's job includes developing revenue streams that record labels wouldn't think of. "This isn't a dying business, this is a changing business," he says. Photograph by Jeff Minton.

(There is a clip of Colin Powell singing it.) During the summer, three of Braun's acts—Jepsen, Bieber, and the Wanted—reached the top three slots in the *Billboard* Hot 100. It has become impossible to walk into a drugstore, a dentist's office, or a slumber party without hearing some emanation from the Bieber-Braun empire.

Bieber came to fame as a musical prodigy—his first "hits" were unadorned YouTube clips of him singing and playing instruments—but, these days, his power as a global brand overshadows his reputation as an artist. (One executive pointed out to me

recently, "I don't think Adele is selling perfume.") Braun is satisfied with having it both ways: he likes to compare Bieber's career with those of Michael Jackson and the Beatles. "I don't think you're selling out by allowing the masses to love your art," he told me. "The only curse is that, when you get so big, sometimes people forget to look at the music."

In the beleaguered music industry, few managers can afford to focus on just selling music anymore. When Braun met David Geffen, at a party a couple of years ago, he said that Geffen had one bit of advice for him: "Get out

of the music business." So Braun has been converting his twelve-person company, SB Projects, into a many-faceted organization: it now has film and TV arms (Braun recently sold a scripted show, and has reality shows in development), a publishing division, and a technology-investment unit, in addition to a label and a management company.

Universal Music Group, one of the "big four" record companies, recently signed a distribution deal with Braun's label and named him its first technology "entrepreneur in residence." Lucian Grainge, Universal's C.E.O., told

me, "He understands the entertainment business, he understands rights, he understands intellectual property, products, social networking, tech—that's what I'm betting on." Also, he added, "the company likes hits, the fans like hits, and that's what he's there to do—make hits. We're not in the art business."

"You know what it is?" Braun asked me one day this summer. "My friend put it best. I'm a camp counselor for pop stars." Braun was in Los Angeles, where he lives, looking after his growing talent roster. His manner is

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