

From Backstage to Center Stage: LaunchPad Music Debuts with Its Inaugural Summit

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An overwhelming feeling of awe takes hold of each attendee as they stand in the center of a once-electrifying venue. Built upon years of history, grit, and success – compounded by the excitement of the room – the air is filled with inspiration.

While most people only get to experience concerts from the audience, LaunchPad rewrote the story, creating a space where students could experience the music industry firsthand. As dozens of young, driven professionals came together in Hartford HealthCare Amphitheater on June 5, 2026 – LaunchPad Music was only just beginning.

LAUNCHING A NEW PATHWAY INTO LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Debuting with its inaugural summit, LaunchPad Music unveiled its mission to create career pathways into the live entertainment industry by transforming barriers into exposure, access, and opportunity.

Opening doors in a multitude of spaces: from artist booking, touring, and production to marketing, branding, sponsorships, and live entertainment, attendees connected directly with professionals where they received real insights and advice on how to head-start their careers. The summit was more than a place of impact; it was a site of students actively taking control of their professional futures.

A DAY INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

With one quick glance around the amphitheater – open notebooks, fingers idling atop pen push buttons, concentrated but curious faces – the tone of the day ahead was clear: motivated and eager to make an impact.

OPENING THE DAY: INTRODUCING LAUNCHPAD MUSIC

After welcoming attendees, the program began with “LaunchPad Music Summit Review,” where Jon Winkel introduced LaunchPad Music’s newest initiative alongside Jim Koplik, Howard Saffan, and Makeda Mays Green. Together, they established the vision for the day, emphasizing how a career in music extends far beyond the spotlight – oftentimes a single job encompasses hundreds of interconnected roles.

MAIN STAGE PANELS: INSIDE THE LIVE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Building on the morning’s introduction, three industry panels gave attendees an inside look at the professionals behind live entertainment, who shared their experiences, challenges, and successes while breaking down the processes that bring concerts to life.

ARTIST BOOKING

Jim Koplik, Kurt Eisele, Hayley Gilchrest, and Dave DiCianni joined moderator SE Cupp to discuss, “The Booking Playbook,” a conversation focused on booking coordination.

MUSIC MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Delving deeper into the behind-the-scenes, Anthony Anthony led a panel focused on music marketing and public relations joined by Jim Bozzi, Alyse Goodman, Tim Tobin, and Dennis Skartsilas.

SPONSORSHIP & BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

Moderated by Wheelhouse Head of Brand Partnerships, Paul Furia, the panel featured Live Nation Regional Vice President Media & Sponsorship, Jeff Wallace, Hartford HealthCare Vice President of Marketing and Communications, Taryn Pemberton, and EVP Hartford HealthCare AMP, Cian Stein.

While attendees had the opportunity to listen, learn, and engage with industry professionals throughout each discussion, the panels collectively reinforced LaunchPad Music’s central message: the live entertainment industry offers countless career paths for those willing to take the first step.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES ACCESS

Following the panels, access into the industry only grew deeper, as students gained an inside look at the amphitheater during a private tour. Guided by Howard Saffan, young professionals not only entered the venue but also experienced the inner workings of live entertainment from a behind-the-scenes perspective.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: HANDS-ON INDUSTRY LEARNING

Structured around rotating breakout sessions, the afternoon schedule allowed attendees to gain an even closer picture into the industry – featuring hands-on sessions and industry insights.

CAREER CENTER: TURNING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

While LaunchPad is committed to creating and sharing life-changing career opportunities, it is equally dedicated to preparing students professionally – equipping them with the tools and confidence needed to succeed.

The midday sessions were centered around this same goal. Attendees had the opportunity to network and participate in mock interviews that put fellows face-to-face with real hiring professionals. These dedicated spaces provided a low-pressure environment, where students could turn advice into immediate action.

By directly exposing students to employer expectations, these young professionals were actively learning, elevating their presence, and refining their communication skills.

KEYNOTE CONVERSATION WITH AN INDUSTRY ICON

Starting as strongly as it began, the day culminated with a keynote from industry veteran Darryl “DMC” McDaniels. As a pioneer of hip-hop, McDaniels shed light on his impactful career and provided young professionals with hope, encouragement, and true insight into the world of live entertainment.

In an intimate fireside conversation with Gary Dell’Abate, moderated by Makeda Mays Green, the conversation weaved through topics of legacy, ownership, and building a career from scratch.

ACCESS IN ACTION

As the day concluded, the inaugural summit proved how LaunchPad Music extends far beyond a one-day event. It represents a long-term commitment to expanding access to the live entertainment industry by connecting aspiring professionals with the people, experiences, and opportunities that can shape their careers.

Walking away – attendees left with more than just valuable insights. They left with new professional connections, meaningful conversations, and tangible next steps. For many, those next steps were the start of a new project, a mentorship, or even the pursuit of an internship.

For dozens of young adults, June 5 was more than a day of professional development; it was the start of their own story. Surrounded by industry leaders and success, their career dreams were no longer inaccessible – they were standing right in the center of it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the summit was made possible by all the dedicated professionals, speakers, and volunteers helping open doors to the next generation of live entertainment leaders. LaunchPad extends its gratitude to the sponsors, including Red Bull, TruNorth X, and Jeff Fortmann, who made the day a possibility, as well as Hartford HealthCare Amphitheater for hosting.

ABOUT LAUNCHPAD

LaunchPad is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that creates and shares life-changing career opportunities in entertainment, sports, music, and finance for underserved young adults. Having served over 1,000 participants, the organization's pipeline and talent acceleration platform features marquee employer partners like Netflix, Paramount, Zillow, ITV America, Wheelhouse, A+E, Versant, Morgan Stanley, and many others.

Event recap written for LaunchPad Music's inaugural summit (June 5, 2026)