

## PROFILES

# TEEN TITAN

The man who made Justin Bieber.

BY LIZZIE WIDDICOMBE SEPTEMBER 3, 2012

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, *Someday*), 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 the scale of Bieber's success have tended to make Braun seem like a lottery winner: a lucky schmo 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. (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 counsellor for pop stars." Braun was in Los Angeles, where he lives, looking after his growing talent roster.

His manner is amiable but volatile—half frat boy, half impresario—and he cuts the burly profile of an athlete during the off-season: he has large lips and a toothy mouth, and he has lately been wearing a close-trimmed beard. He had on his usual uniform, of a Yankees cap, jeans, and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt purchased at Disneyland, where he gets many of his T-shirts. “It’s a nonthreatening thing,” he said. “The whole world loves Mickey.”

At 10 A.M., he got into the passenger seat of a black BMW that belonged to his assistant, a twenty-four-year-old named Teddy Riley, and reviewed his schedule. As often happens, he was supposed to be several places at once: a rehearsal with the Wanted for the NBC show “The Voice”; an interview that Spike Lee was conducting with Bieber for a documentary about Michael Jackson; and a video shoot with Cody Simpson, a fifteen-year-old Australian singer. Braun said that he wanted to go to all three events. Riley stepped on the gas: “It’s gonna be tough, but we can make it happen.”

Staffing at record companies has decreased almost sixty per cent in the past decade, and managers now perform many of the functions traditionally handled by label executives—suggesting a producer, scheduling release dates and media appearances, and devising marketing strategies. Braun sees part of his job as developing revenue streams that labels wouldn’t think of. “This isn’t a dying business, this is a changing business,” he told me. “CD sales have declined drastically, but the over-all business has grown: licensing, merchandising, digital sales. Ten years ago, a pop star might not have a fragrance that does a hundred and twenty million dollars in business in a year.” He went on, “My job is to make sure a client doesn’t have any ‘what if’s—to make sure, when you look back, you don’t say, ‘What if I had done this? What if I had done that?’ ” Among Bieber’s other revenue streams: “Never Say Never,” a 2011 movie that Braun produced about Bieber’s life, which was the highest-grossing concert film in U.S. history; a line of watches, backpacks, and singing dolls; a “home” collection that includes comforter sets and shower curtains; and an endorsement deal with Proactiv, a purveyor of acne remedies. All this has made Bieber rich—his annual income is estimated to exceed fifty million dollars—and has given Braun a unique economic power. A big part of a manager’s job, one industry veteran told me, is “getting an artist to say yes to things.”

Braun arrived at the set of “The Voice.” Two of the five members of the Wanted, Thomas Parker and Max George, were outside, sharing a cigarette. Both are twenty-three and from Manchester. (For a reason that Braun can’t explain, most of his acts are from the British Commonwealth.) They had been issued yellow nametags, which they’d applied to their crotches. To set the Wanted apart from other boy bands, Braun has encouraged them to embrace a bad-boy image, and to flaunt the fact that they like to party. George said that

he was glad to be of drinking age: “There’s nuffin’ worse than coming to America and bein’ under twenty-one!”

Inside, the group did a run-through of their song “Chasing the Sun”—an Ibiza-inflected club number with a thumping bass. Braun watched intently on a small monitor. Afterward, he approached the band and said, “You guys, that was great,” but told them that they needed to show more enthusiasm. “During the breakdown, I want to hear one of your voices saying, ‘America, let’s go!’” He added, “And smile.” The five young men nodded blankly.

After the rehearsal, Braun and the Wanted climbed into golf carts and were driven to a red-carpeted area that housed the talent trailers. There was a buzz in the air—a pack of assistants and security staff stood around tensely—that indicated the presence of Justin Bieber, who was slated to make a short appearance on “The Voice,” to promote his new album. Bieber, who had just turned eighteen, wore a white T-shirt, tight black jeans sagging low, and unlaced Timberland boots. His hair was swept up into a James Dean pompadour, and a black bandanna with skulls on it dangled from his back pocket. He was much smaller than the young men in the Wanted, and he looked frail and skittish. (At one point, Braun reminded me, “That skinny kid you just met is the most Googled person on the planet by like two hundred million hits.”)

Bieber greeted the members of the Wanted familiarly. (Braun’s policy, among his acts, is that “everyone’s family, everyone has to get along.”)

“It’s your birthday, bro?” Bieber said to Nathan Sykes, one of the band’s singers. He had been prepped by Braun, who was throwing Sykes a party that night, at the Playboy Mansion. The young men immediately began comparing tattoos. George lifted up his shirt to reveal some song lyrics: “We try / we fall / we live another day.”

“Dope,” Bieber said, and pulled up his pant leg to show, on his calf, a large tattoo of Jesus with hands clasped in prayer. (Bieber and his mother are devout Christians.) The Wanted members looked a little stunned.

Braun mentioned that Bieber was interested in English soccer.

“Have you got a team?”

“Not really,” Bieber said. “I like Chelsea.”

Carson Daly, the host of “The Voice,” walked by. Braun called out, “Hey, Carson!” Daly and Braun began to review a script detailing stage patter.

Bored, Bieber started a game, playfully jabbing everyone in the crotch with his fist. First, he jabbed at Braun, who, without looking up from the script, dropped his hands to block. Daly did the same. When Bieber jabbed at Siva Kaneswaran, a member of the Wanted, he connected. He called out, “Got you, bro.” Kaneswaran balled his fist but seemed unsure how to respond. “I don’t want to hurt his pretty face,” he said.

Braun said, “Just get him in the pretty balls. It’s fair game.”

“No, it’s not,” Bieber said.

Braun took a firm tone. “Justin, it is—fair game,” he said. “You hit him in the balls, fair game.”

Bieber was peeved. “Where’re we going?” he asked. “Where’s my dressing room?”

Wherever there’s talent, there’s a talent manager. When Mozart was a child piano prodigy, his father, Leopold, travelled around with him, booking tours and stoking his son’s reputation in the Salzburg court. Danny Goldberg, who managed Nirvana before going on to run various record labels, told me that there are two ongoing stories about what a music manager is. One is the underappreciated visionary: “the manager who gives everything to the artist, sacrifices for them, and then, once the artist becomes successful, is cast aside” (Andrew Oldham and the Rolling Stones, for instance). The other is the manager as Svengali: a scheming puppeteer who exploits a star to satisfy his own greed or ambition (Lou Pearlman, the impresario behind the Backstreet Boys and ’NSync, whom Justin Timberlake later accused of “financial rape,” and who went to prison for conspiracy and money laundering).

Braun is sometimes compared to Colonel Tom Parker, the onetime carnival barker who masterminded the transformation of Elvis Presley, from country bumpkin to rock-and-roll icon. Parker, a Svengali type, embodied the concept of the manager as capitalist, constantly pushing for more lucrative deals for his client, turning him into a movie franchise and a merchandising industry worth millions. But he took a fifty-per-cent cut of Presley’s earnings, and kept Presley psychologically isolated and dependent, denying access to anyone who could threaten his all-controlling power over the star he called “my boy.”

Braun is similar to Parker in that he is a businessman and not a music coach, and he plays a major role in his young client’s life. Like Parker, who signed his letters “Elvis and the Colonel,” Braun likes to cultivate his own celebrity. He constantly updates his Twitter account, which has 1.8 million followers. And he can frequently be seen on TV, acting as Bieber’s mouthpiece. Prepubescent Bieber fans often mob Braun in public, screaming “Scooter! Scooter!” When he turned thirty, he threw a star-studded birthday bash for

himself; at the party, according to the Los Angeles *Times*, Bieber roasted Braun by doing an impression of him pitching a “Never Say Never” sequel, insisting, “My name has to be on the poster!”

Braun cops to the Colonel Parker comparison, but he says that the similarities go only so far. His public profile, he says, is part of an over-all ethos of transparency. “What you see is what you get with me,” he said. “It’s not a manipulation thing.” Braun emphasizes that he takes a standard management fee, “between fifteen and twenty per cent,” and, unlike some managers, he doesn’t “double-dip”—that is, collect both royalties and a management fee from an artist who is signed to his label. “If you’ve got to gouge someone, then that’s very short-term thinking,” he said.

Colonel Parker treated Elvis as his private property. Braun, who has “Family” tattooed on his wrist, treats Bieber more like a ward. His name for Bieber, around the office, is “the kid.” Braun is very close to Bieber’s mother, Pattie Mallette, who gave birth to Justin when she was seventeen—“We’re like brother and sister,” she told me of Braun—and Braun often assumes a quasi-parental role with Justin. “Justin’s and my relationship is not a manager-artist relationship,” Braun said. “When he was thirteen, I said, ‘If you stop singing, if you never dance again, if you never play again, I’m going to be in your life.’” Before every concert, Bieber prays to Jesus and recites the Shema, a Jewish prayer, with Braun and the rest of his team. Braun’s Twitter feed is filled with cheerleading (“He killed it!!! #Proud”), but he takes a tough-love approach when he needs to. “I’ll curse his ass out if I think it’s necessary,” he said.

Before one performance, I was whisked into Bieber’s dressing room, where the teen star was leaning back on a couch, strumming a guitar. Braun had prepped Bieber before my arrival and had asked him to think of three qualities that his manager possessed. Bieber strummed his guitar and began to sing his response, plinking a string with every phrase. “Three things that describe Scooter,” he said. (Plink.) “He is persistent.” (Plink.) “Intelligent.” (Plink.) “And good-aggressive.” He stopped playing, and said, in a more earnest voice, “Like, when he wants something, he’s aggressive to get it done. He’s not, like, going to beat around the bush.” I asked what role Braun played in his life, and he said, “He’s like a close uncle.”

Soon, Bieber’s attention drifted. He held down the strings on the neck of the guitar and began strumming it fast, making an irritating, buzzing noise.

Braun ignored him. “He’s just too much like me,” he said. “It’s really annoying. He has the same temper I had at that age, but he doesn’t have the years of wisdom, so he makes my temper come back out.” He turned to Bieber. “O.K., now my favorite. What’s my biggest fault?”

Bieber looked at me with a pleading expression, and said, in a way that seemed sincere, “He’s too hard to impress.” He went on, his voice cracking, “He’s too hard on me. In life. Like, he wants me to be . . .”

High standards?

“Yeah.”

The template from which Braun takes his ideas about work, character, and management is basketball. He grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, the grandson of Holocaust survivors. Braun’s father, Ervin, a dentist, met his mother, Susan, an orthodontist, at the University of Pennsylvania. Ervin worried that raising his children—Scott (Scooter), Adam, and Liza—in affluent Greenwich would make them soft. Scott and Adam played the sports that Ervin had played at Bronx Science—basketball, football, and swimming. Lacrosse and hockey were out, because, Scooter says, Ervin thought of them as “rich-people sports.”

Basketball took primacy, and Ervin Braun founded a local A.A.U. team, the Connecticut Flame. “The game made me professional,” Scooter told me. It delivered lessons in fearlessness: “That I shouldn’t be afraid of a full-court press.” In the selflessness required of a coach: “It’s my fault when we lose; it’s their victory when we win.” It also dissolved racial and class barriers. For years, the Brauns were among the few white players on their team. “By the time I was eighteen, those were my brothers,” Scooter said.

The summer before Scott left for college, Ervin needed some extra players for an All-Star tournament. He found Sam Manhanga, fifteen, and Cornelio Gouibunda, fourteen, former members of the Mozambique national team, who were well over six feet tall. The two had been lured to the U.S. by a recruiter who promised to get them American educations, but the program turned out to be a scam. After hearing their tale, Ervin invited the boys to stay with his family in Greenwich.

The Brauns ended up serving as legal guardians for Sam and Cornelio, who became stars of the Greenwich High basketball team. The team went to the league finals, but the sudden presence of two Mozambican ringers did not go over well. Opposing teams would sometimes throw things on the court, or chant “U-S-A” and “Go back to Africa.” The experience “forced me to grow up really fast,” Adam Braun, who drove Sam and Cornelio to school each day, said. He eventually founded a charity, Pencils of Promise, which builds schools in developing nations. Sam and Cornelio attended prestigious colleges on basketball scholarships, and are now married and living in the U.S., the former working as a commodities analyst, and the latter at the State Department.

Scooter Braun likes to point out that he has “two black brothers.” By the time Sam and Cornelio moved in, though, he was in his freshman year at Emory University, in Atlanta, where he played on a Division 3 basketball team.

At Emory, Braun didn’t like telling people that he was from Greenwich. “So I told everyone I was from Queens,” he said. To earn spending money, he got involved in a lucrative fake-I.D. business, and then started organizing parties at night clubs. “I got eight hundred kids at my first party,” Braun said. Within weeks, he was the biggest party promoter on campus. Within months, he had quit basketball.

As he began drawing larger crowds, he realized that he could extract more money from club owners if he moved his parties around, so that the parties became associated with his name, not with any one club. “My leverage was being able to move the parties from club to club each week,” he said. His events catered mostly to white students, but, in Atlanta’s divided club scene, they also had an unusual racial mix. Local music celebrities—Chingy, Cee-Lo—started showing up. Braun never drank. “I don’t like losing control,” he said. “I was never the guy at the table with the bottles. Or, if I was at the table with the bottles, I was doing it strategically. I developed relationships.” Chaka Zulu, the manager of the rapper Ludacris, said that Braun held his own as a white kid among black musicians. “I don’t think he posed,” Zulu said. “It wasn’t like he was trying to be black. He was just himself.”

In the early two-thousands, Atlanta’s hip-hop scene was churning out a wave of superstars—Outkast, Lil Jon, Ludacris. Braun was ubiquitous. The singer Ciara referred to him as her “big brother.” Lil Jon called him “the white Puff Daddy.” Braun became an all-purpose celebrity fixer, arranging parties for ’NSync, Britney Spears and Kevin Federline, Ludacris, and Shaquille O’Neal. One day, the producer and rapper Jermaine Dupri came to a party with his then girlfriend, Janet Jackson. As Braun recalls, “He’s like, ‘You’re never going to get to living in mansions by throwing parties.’ ” After Dupri asked him to become the head of marketing at his label, So So Def, Braun dropped out of college.

A few years later, the glow was wearing off. Braun had found a couple of rap groups to manage, the Bama Boyz and O.D., but neither had panned out. Then Braun was fired from So So Def, after a dispute over the direction of the label. He agonized over his next move. “I was a college dropout,” he said, “and I was scared of failing.”

He knew that, whatever he did next, he wanted equity. “I wanted a stake in whatever business I was working on,” he said. He did some freelance consulting. Pretending to be a writer for a college newspaper, he called up Pontiac and said that he was doing a story on the company’s marketing strategy. The next day, armed with the names of some Pontiac executives, he cold-called them and lined up a multimillion-dollar

endorsement deal for Ludacris. Then he set up a management company, signing the white rapper Asher Roth, whom he'd found on MySpace: "I flew Asher and his boys down to Atlanta, got them a place, and started paying their bills." He had money in the bank but no income. "I figured I had about fourteen months where I could live my life style until I went broke."

Braun's first encounter with Bieber, via YouTube, has become a pop legend. While doing consulting work for the singer Akon, Braun stumbled across a clip of a twelve-year-old Bieber singing a Ne-Yo song at a talent show in Stratford, Ontario. At the time, the Jonas Brothers, a teen group who appeared on the Disney Channel, were huge, and Braun was looking for an act in a similar vein. He remembers telling Chaka Zulu, "I've got to find a kid who can do what Michael"—Jackson—"did. I said, 'There's a place in the market for a kid who can sing with an angelic, soulful voice.' "

When Braun saw the Bieber clip, he told me, "I was like, 'This is the kid I've been looking for.' " Braun became obsessed with signing Bieber, and called all over—to the theatre where the talent show had been held, to the Stratford school board—until, finally, he tracked down Bieber's mother, Pattie Mallette. They talked on the phone for two hours, and, Mallette said, "we really connected." She agreed to bring Bieber to Atlanta for a no-strings-attached trial period. Eventually, Braun said, "I flew him and his mom down, got them a town house, bought all the furniture for their place, and started paying their bills."

Instead of hawking his new talent to record companies, Braun set about building a bigger following for Bieber on YouTube, where his videos had already attracted tens of thousands of views. In Atlanta, he and Mallette made and posted low-fi videos of Bieber belting out R. & B. covers. Braun made sure to show Bieber playing instruments—drums, a guitar that looked too big for him—to emphasize that he had musical chops. Bieber was urged to get rid of the "cheap church suit" he'd brought from Canada, and told to be just a kid in a baggy T-shirt.

Braun calls this kind of grassroots approach "authentic marketing"—a phrase, like "amicable divorce," or "peacekeeper missile," that sounds like an oxymoron. Explaining the idea, he cited "Mark Zuckerberg's philosophy that the whole world should be open and everything should be shared," and said that today's young people think that "there should be nothing hidden, you can't lie to us. Authentic marketing is respecting the consumer: make a viable product, and just concentrate on getting eyeballs on it and telling its story."

When Bieber's videos had attracted around fifty-four million eyeballs, Braun arranged meetings with fifteen music executives in New York and L.A. "I'm not someone who likes to go in and say, 'Hey, we *could* do this,' " he said. "I'd rather create leverage by providing a model of something that is already

working.” None of the executives bit. They said that Bieber, being a teen act, needed a platform—a show on the Disney Channel, say, or a slot on “American Idol.”

After the first round of rejections, Braun realized that a YouTube following wasn’t enough. He pitched Bieber to two R. & B. stars, Usher and Justin Timberlake, who had his own imprint, at Interscope. When both expressed interest, he pitted the stars against each other, turning the ensuing bidding war into good press. Usher recalls, “Instantly I knew this kid had something different.” Island Def Jam, led by Usher’s mentor, the music executive L. A. Reid, prevailed, signing Bieber to a “360 deal,” in which the label takes a cut of all revenues, including ticket sales and merchandising. There was also a fifty-fifty profit split between the label and a new production company that Braun and Usher had formed. Braun says that Island Def Jam, in addition to covering recording costs, agreed to pay for a private tutor for Bieber, and for housing and moving expenses.

Once Bieber had a label and Usher as a spokesperson, traditional marketing mechanisms fell into place. Bieber appeared on MTV. Ludacris and Usher performed in his videos. Ellen DeGeneres devoted an hour of her talk show to Bieber and Usher; there was pandemonium in the audience. Two years later, Bieber was performing at the White House, where he greeted the President, in a receiving line, by saying, “What up, my dude?”

Barry Weiss, the chairman of Island Def Jam, said, “Between YouTube and Usher, Scooter created a platform that basically hadn’t existed.” The involvement of African-American stars also helped to burnish the credibility of Bieber, a white R. & B. singer. Usher told me, “We gave him swag. We gave him a cool button that the other kids just didn’t have.”

Braun recently bought a house in the Hollywood Hills. It is a large, modern bachelor pad with double-height ceilings and a wall of windows overlooking the city. To get to the front door, you walk on slate stepping stones through a koi pond. In the foyer are shelves displaying meaningful tokens: a signed copy of the basketball coach John Wooden’s “Pyramid to Success”; a sketch of Braun’s sports car, a hundred-thousand-dollar electric vehicle called the Fisker Karma (“I got one for me and one for Justin,” he said. “It makes you help the environment, but you also don’t have to feel like a pussy”); a poster commemorating Bieber’s performance at the White House, signed by President Obama. Braun told me that he was buying the house next door, to tear it down: “I’m putting in a basketball court.”

The home is the center of operations for Braun’s blossoming mini-moguldom—you could say that he’s halfway up the Geffen scale. In addition to tending his music projects, Braun is part of a cadre of entertainment types—others include Ashton Kutcher, Bono, and Will.i.am—who make regular trips to

Silicon Valley to schmooze, attend conferences, and invest. (Will.i.am, who is an adviser to Intel, told me, “It’s our generation that understands the freakin’ code to the matrix.”) Braun has put money into ten startups, including the car company Uber, the social-networking service Stamped, and the music-sharing program Spotify. He said, “I’ve got an investment in a gold mine that does very well.”

He has been buying art, too. He has paintings of Mickey Mouse and Superman, by Warhol, and, one afternoon in L.A., he stopped by a gallery to look at some work by Takashi Murakami.

It was a few minutes before closing time. Braun strolled into the gallery wearing jeans, flip-flops, a red “Star Wars” T-shirt, and a green Army cap. He pondered a few small Murakami prints, then moved on to a larger painting, a glittery black-and-white silk screen of Marlon Brando, done in a Warhol style, by the British-born artist Russell Young. “How much is that?” Braun asked a gallery assistant.

The assistant, a thin woman in glasses whose spike heels echoed on the gallery floor, seemed impatient. “Twenty-seven thousand dollars,” she said.

“I love that one,” Braun said.

The gallery assistant raised her eyebrows. “Is that piece realistic for you?”

Braun had told me that he doesn’t like to announce his job to people he’s just met. Nevertheless, he was offended. “Uh, yeah,” he said.

“So do you want to secure the piece now?”

“No,” Braun said, and added, in a pushier voice, like the one he uses for business calls, “I want to see everything else you have by him.”

The gallery assistant gave him a brittle smile and walked over to a computer. “What’s your name?”

“Scooter.”

“Scooter? Pleasure.”

Just then, he noticed a sculpture by the door: a three-foot-tall Mickey Mouse toy. It was fifteen hundred dollars, but it wasn’t for sale. “Can you get me another one?” Braun asked.

“I can check,” the gallery assistant said. “But only if you confirm that you definitely want it.”

Braun had grown steely. “Yes,” he said. “I want it.”

“And you’ll take it now?”

“Yes,” he said. A few minutes later, he walked out of the gallery with the Mickey Mouse under his arm.

When David Geffen was launching a group like the Eagles, he took them to the Troubadour, in L.A., or put them on tour with a bigger act. When Lou Pearlman and Johnny Wright were launching the Backstreet Boys, they had them perform in middle schools and produced an expensive video for MTV. Braun does such things, but he combines them with the power of Bieber’s social-media following. Barry Lowenthal, the president of Media Kitchen, an ad agency that is promoting Bieber’s new fragrance, *Girlfriend*, told the *Times* that the reach of a Bieber dispatch across networks like Facebook and Twitter would cost ten million dollars to replicate through conventional advertising methods.

I saw Braun take numerous meetings with people who wanted to get a piece of Bieber and Braun’s marketing power, including one with TV executives proposing an online tween channel and one with a Web company, called China Branding Group, that would serve as an endorsement agent for Bieber in China. Braun was optimistic about all of them.

Braun uses Bieber’s fame as a P.R. platform for his other clients as well. He makes it worth Bieber’s while: when Braun signed Carly Rae Jepsen, he gave Bieber a fifty-per-cent cut. Braun told him, “We’ll be partners. But you’re going to do your part, being a loudspeaker: put her on your tour, sing a song with her.” And Bieber obeyed. The homemade video of him horsing around to Jepsen’s “Call Me Maybe” got forty-eight million views and made the song catch fire. Last month, he tweeted to introduce the world to Braun’s newest client, Madison Beer, a thirteen-year-old singer who resembles a baby Megan Fox. Within minutes, her name was trending worldwide.

Cross-promotion is all part of the interdependent business culture that Braun has created. For instance, he cuts Bieber in on many of his tech investments. Sometimes he has Bieber put money into a start-up company directly; sometimes he offers to have him promote a product in return for equity. “If it makes sense for Justin’s brand, I show it to him,” Braun said. (He has a similar relationship with his other artists, and with Ellen DeGeneres, with whom he has shared tech-investing tips: “She put me onto something, and I put her onto something.”)

Braun has one requirement for any investment: “Every deal has to have a charitable component.” A portion of Bieber’s perfume sales, and the proceeds from last year’s Christmas album, went to twenty charities, including the Make a Wish Foundation and Pencils of Promise, his brother Adam’s charity. Braun’s

reasons: “One, karma—it’s everything I stand for. Two, it is the right thing to do. And, three, it is proven that a for-profit business makes more money in the long run if it has a not-for-profit component.”

Bieber’s fans, who call themselves Beliebers, are often drafted into these charity drives. When the Christmas album came out, the Beliebers banded together to hold “buyouts”: after coordinating on Twitter, they swarmed big-box stores and bought all the Bieber CDs in stock, to boost sales. The fans now stage buyouts for any new release, though the profits go primarily to Bieber and Braun.

Occasionally, Braun’s deal-making has created awkwardness for Bieber’s squeaky-clean image. Last year, Bieber made a series of public-service announcements discouraging texting while driving, in which he urged fans to buy an app called PhoneGuard, which prevents a user from typing on a phone in a moving car. Bieber had been given warrants to buy sixteen per cent of the stock of PhoneGuard’s parent company, a struggling Boca Raton firm called Options Media. (The company’s president, Anthony Sasso, resigned after it emerged that he was a convicted felon; Braun’s father, Ervin, later served on the board.) Options Media’s stock, which had been trading for around a penny before Bieber got involved, spiked briefly following his endorsement. It has since fallen to as low as a tenth of a cent a share.

The biggest hurdle for teen idols is making the transition into adult stardom. Braun wants to see Bieber become a lifelong icon, in the vein of Michael Jackson (without the tragic ending). But Bieber’s continued success depends on his ability to come up with radio hits, which means appealing to a broader audience. The release of “Believe,” Bieber’s new album, represents a gentle attempt to point him toward older audiences: the songs are not as sickly-sweet as his early hit single “Baby.” In his new videos, Bieber is cast as a brooding sex symbol, though the role doesn’t always fit: a video for the recent single “Boyfriend” shows a bunch of sultry older women pawing at a skinny, baby-faced boy. (The song was ultimately a success on the radio; the album’s second single, “As Long As You Love Me,” is working its way up the charts.)

Another wild card is Bieber himself. It’s possible to foresee a time when he won’t want to cooperate with the plans that his manager lays out for him; at the moment, a delicate give-and-take prevails. On a Wednesday in June, Bieber was scheduled to perform on the “Tonight Show” with Jay Leno. Braun arrived early, wearing a “Star Trek” T-shirt and his Army cap, and sat watching backup dancers run through “Boyfriend.” Bieber, who now lives with a friend, in a ninety-four-hundred-square-foot house, was supposed to get himself to the rehearsal, but he was already an hour late. “Where is my client?” Braun said, sounding testy. He called Bieber’s cell phone and yelled, “Where are you?” When he hung up, he said, cheerfully, “I said, ‘O.K., you asked to be trusted and you blew it.’ Now he goes on what I call probation. He has to have somebody come to his house every workday.”

The star eventually arrived, and Braun watched the “Boyfriend” taping from the wings. Afterward, he passed Bieber in the hall. “You went the wrong way,” Braun said.

“What?”

“When you first did this thing”—Braun executed a dance step—“on the breakdown? You went the opposite of everyone else for the first step.”

Bieber seemed to find the criticism nitpicky. He asked softly, “Who cares, though?”

Braun had been consulting with the film editors. “I’m just gonna take it out,” he said. “It was a great performance. I’m just going to take that one thing out.”

“That’s fine,” Bieber said, sounding aloof.

Braun smiled. “He wants me to take it out,” he told me. “He just doesn’t want to have to think about it.” He strode away to meet with the editors.

These days, it’s rare to walk into the grocery store and hear songs by the Jonas Brothers and Miley Cyrus, who were superstars only a few years ago. In the fast-moving world of teen pop, the best-laid plans for the future have a way of falling apart. A music executive who has worked with several successful teen-age acts told me, “Teen things happen so fast. If you’re really good at it, you figure out how to harness every possible dollar as long as it lasts.” Braun understands this, and his efforts on behalf of his clients can sometimes seem like a race against the clock. One day, I heard him scream at a label executive on the phone, accusing the company of not hustling enough on behalf of one of his clients, who, he pointed out, was not getting any younger: “The one thing he has going for him is he’s younger than everyone else!”

In addition to Bieber and his other stars, Braun is trying to keep the pipeline full, and he has five or six new acts in development. When it comes to identifying new talent, he has few hard-and-fast rules. “My trick is trusting my gut,” he told me, “and when people say I’m crazy it usually means I’m on track.”

One afternoon, I sat in on a meeting Braun had in his living room with a potential client, a nineteen-year-old singer named Tori Kelly, and her parents. At eleven, Kelly had appeared on the TV series “America’s Most Talented Kid,” and she’d had a deal with the Geffen label. But her career had stalled.

Braun leaned back on the couch, his hands crossed behind his head. “So what do you guys want to do?” he asked in an antsy tone. “I think you’re a real artist with a real voice. I want to understand what you want so I can help you out.”

Kelly's mom, wearing pink Capri pants, explained that Kelly had just self-released an album, which was charting on iTunes. Kelly named a few pop acts that she'd like to open for: Beyoncé, Alicia Keyes, Justin Timberlake. "Justin"—meaning Bieber—"would be great." She said that she'd like to perform with a band and with choreography, "if it fits."

Braun interrupted: "You've been doing this for a while now. What do you think the holdup has been?"

Kelly said, in a small voice, "I think the people we have worked with, they don't see the full picture. They don't know what to do with me."

After a minute, Kelly picked up one of Braun's guitars and performed a song—the chorus went, "Lavish me with your love." It sounded a bit like acoustic Lauryn Hill. Braun listened attentively. It was nothing like the R. & B. and dance-oriented pop on his roster.

When Kelly finished, Braun asked, "Are you a fan of Jewel?"

She said, politely, "I'm not super-familiar . . ."

Braun jumped in. "Let me give you the background," he said. "Jewel tried to get signed, it didn't work out. She drove to California, and she lived in her car. She was homeless, she played coffee shops. She wrote really amazing songs. Then she sold millions of records." He explained that in the late nineties, during the height of Jewel's fame, the charts were dominated by elaborate pop acts like the Backstreet Boys and 'NSync. "But the biggest female star on the planet was someone who came in with a guitar, real quiet, and people would sit there and just be blown away by these singer-songwriter songs." He went on, "That is the lane for you. There is a time for that again."

Kelly was wary. Her father said, "So, like, a Jewel-meets-Fiona Apple-meets-Beyoncé?"

Braun said, "Jewel-meets-Tori Kelly. The Beyoncé thing comes later." He said that the strategy was a marketing approach, not a musical one. "People compartmentalize things. Kobe needs to be like Jordan. Justin Bieber needs to be like Justin Timberlake. You want to dictate to the public who you want them to compare you to. If I was to market you, I'd *want* them to call you the next Jewel. Because if another Jewel came out, in today's music market, people would go crazy. That's what they're missing."

Kelly asked, meekly, "How about just the next Tori Kelly?"