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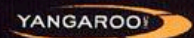
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Timing is everything for three artists at various points in their careers

A Diva, Tequila And A Fresh Start

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New beginnings can take many forms. For one artist, it comes with her 37th album and required a little patience. For another, a new start had to be preceded by a step back. And for yet another, a new beginning means chasing her dream.

'Taking Chances' Pays Off, But It Took A Minute

For a moment, it appeared that Celine Dion might have misfired with "Taking Chances" (Columbia). The title track from her 37th album got off to an auspicious start, blazing onto the Sept. 28, 2007, AC chart at No. 23, with Most Increased Plays and Most Added honors. But by the beginning of December, most stations in the format had thrown the switch to all-Christmas, and Dion stalled at No. 11—just one slot from setting an AC record.

The song, which inched down to No. 16, found new life Jan. 11 when holiday music was swept up the AC chimney for another year. "Taking Chances" burst up to No. 7, becoming her first top 10 since 2003.

Dion now claims sole possession for most AC top 10 hits

during the past two decades, as her 21st ranker breaks a tie that Elton John held since 1990. She also holds the record for most No. 1 hits at the format (11) and most charted titles (38).

"Taking Chances" marks a departure from the skyscraping ballad style that has defined much of Dion's career, with the singer roaring amid a wall of guitars rather than soaring atop a cloud of strings. She says, "I am used to aiming for a sound that is technically perfect. This time I wanted to sing with a different kind of grain. It was time to evolve and do something different."

Jim Ryan, outgoing senior VP of AC programming for Clear Channel and WLTW/New York PD, says that "Taking Chances" "does great in callout and sounds awesome on the radio. She is still a core AC artist—one of few. This is truly an event record."

Meanwhile, "Taking Chances" has tipped the chart scales in another direction: In remixed form, it is Dion's first No. 1 on Billboard's Hot Dance Club Play chart since 1994's "Misled."—Chuck Taylor



Celine Dion

'2007 was the weirdest year of my career. It woke me up in a lot of ways.' —Joe Nichols

Jessy J Gets Her Shot With 'Tequila'

What do you call an accomplished, 26-year-old saxophonist whose maiden single is off to a hot start at smooth jazz? Try Jessica Spinella, aka Jessy J. The title track from the instrumentalist's "Tequila Moon" (Peak Records/Concord Music Group) recently debuted at No. 30 on R&R's Smooth Jazz chart and is No. 21 this week. Influential, major-market smooth jazz outlets are already onboard, including CBS Radio's KTWV (the Wave)/Los Angeles, Lincoln Financial's KIFM/San Diego and KJCD/Denver, and Clear Channel's WSMJ/Baltimore.

KJCD PD Michael Fischer learned of Jessy J through syndicated "JazzTrax" host Art Good, who featured her at the Catalina JazzTrax Festival. "Great records work themselves," says Fischer, who immediately added the single. WSMJ PD Lori Lewis, who calls the song "very sexy," says Jessy J is "the total package: fun, fresh and working her dream."



Jessy J

Jessy J may be young, but she's no upstart. Her piano studies began at age 4, and by 15 she had established a career that included touring with Michael Bubl , Burt Bacharach and Michael Bolton.

Produced by Paul Brown, "Tequila Moon" combines six songs that Jessy J either wrote or co-wrote with sly covers, including swing-era hit "Besame Mucho," which has been recorded by more than 700 acts, including the Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Dave Brubeck and Diana Krall. "Mas Que Nada" (S rgio Mendes, the Black Eyed Peas, among others) and Leon Russell's "Song for You" are also included on the project, which is slated for a March 4 release.—Carol Ancher

Nichols' 'Weird' '07 Turns Into Stronger Start In '08

"2007 was the weirdest year of my career," country star Joe Nichols says. Despite releasing his fifth studio album, "Real Things" (Universal South), in August, the 2003 Country Music Assn. Horizon Award winner didn't make much chart noise. The album's first single, "Another Side of You," peaked at No. 17 in November.

There were, however, some notable nonmusical events in Nichols' life last year. He married his girlfriend, Heather Singleton, in September and a month later, he entered a rehabilitation facility for

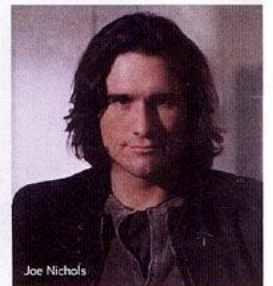
substance abuse. For the first time in his career, people were talking more about his personal life than his music, which he calls "an odd place to be."

While more at ease discussing his music than his private side, Nichols says seeking treatment "was an opportunity to get right with a lot of things—God, my friends and family." If 2007 had been a big year musically, he says, "I might not have had that chance. [It] woke me up in a lot of ways."

His 6-month-old album, which has sold 89,000 copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan, seems like a

new project, fueled by momentum from current single "It Ain't No Crime." For an artist somewhat under the radar of late, "Crime" is the fastest-rising song of his career. He scored his highest debut when the track appeared at No. 45 on R&R's Jan. 11 Country chart; it is now No. 24.

Citadel KXKC/Lafayette, La., PD Casey Carter, whose station played the single 30 times during the week ending Feb. 4, according to Nielsen BDS, says Nichols is a staple in her market. "Our listeners can't seem to get enough of him."—R.J. Curtis



Joe Nichols