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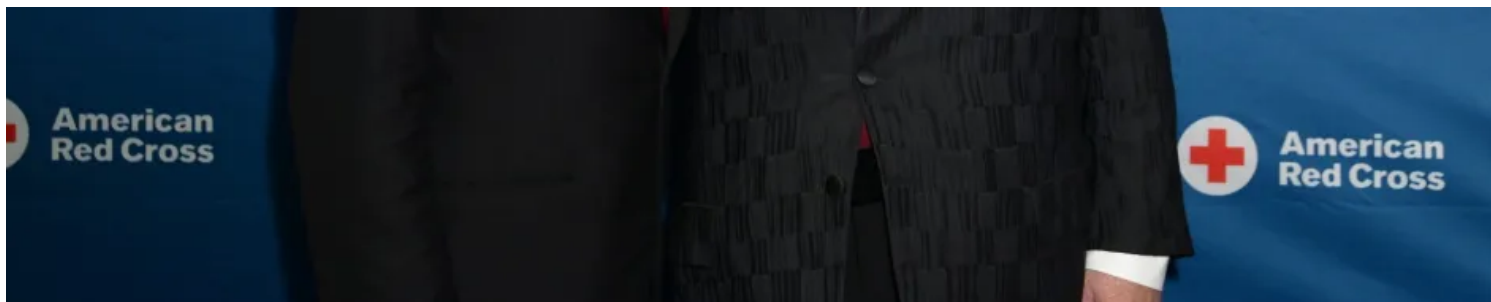
RECORD LABELS 6/23/2026

CLIVE DAVIS REMEMBERED: CHARLES GOLDSTUCK ON J RECORDS' LAUNCH & THEIR 'PITCH DARK' PRINCE MEETING

Goldstuck discusses his favorite memories of the late mogul, from dealing with Bill Clinton's Secret Service to scoring Prince's *Rave* album for Arista.

By **Charles Goldstuck**





Charles Goldstruck and Clive Davis attend the 2025 Red & White Ball.

BOB CAPAZZO, CARA GILBRIDE

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I have never met a human being who did not love music. The love of music is universal. But then there was **Clive Davis** — for six decades, he immersed himself in the pursuit of great music. Never compromising. Never settling. A

relentless drive to ensure perfection. Always wanting to only produce the best. Until the very end, music was always front of mind for Clive.

We joined forces well into his storied career. One could not wish for a greater friend or business partner. Our first test — and it was a big one — occurred in November 1999. Clive had been asked to have dinner with then-BMG Entertainment chairman **Michael Dornemann** and CEO **Strauss Zelnick**. They informed him that due to Bertelsmann's mandatory retirement age, which at the time was 60, he was being replaced as CEO of Arista Records and “moved into a chairman's role”. Clive was 66. Clive walked out of the dinner, and when he got back to his apartment, he called me with the news. He was completely blindsided. As he said that evening: “**Ahmet [Ertegun, founder and chairman of Atlantic Records, and one of Clive's great rivals]** is in his late 70s — I am a spring chicken as compared to him.” He was, as he put it, “... at the peak of my powers”. Arista had released **Carlos Santana** (<https://www.billboard.com/artist/carlos-santana/>)'s *Supernatural* album in June 1999. The album would go on to sell over 30 million albums and win nine Grammy Awards. Clive was at his best.

We assembled a team of advisors, including **Allen Grubman, Joel Katz** and **Fred Davis**, who helped plan Clive's next move.

The end result of this upheaval was our launching J Records the next year. Our partner was Bertelsmann. Clive was on a mission. He called J Records an “instant major,” and with a \$150 million war chest (one of the biggest investments in a new music entity at the time), we were competitive. We competed with all the major labels. Our first office was half a floor in the Waldorf Hotel Towers. We removed all the hotel furniture and installed office

furniture. The only problem was that the Waldorf was the locale of choice for U.S. presidents and world leaders.

A few weeks after moving in, we were paid a visit by the U.S. Secret Service. Bill Clinton, who was the president at the time, was coming to New York and was going to be in residence on the floor above us. The Secret Service needed to perform a security sweep of our various rooms. They came in with several German Shepherd sniffer dogs and asked us to leave the premises while they conducted their sweep. These dogs had a ferocious look about them and were quite intimidating. Clive and I were sitting at his makeshift desk, grappling with completing **Alicia Keys** (<https://www.billboard.com/artist/alicia-keys/>)' debut album, *Songs in A Minor*. Clive calmly told the Secret Service agents that their German Shepherds were disrupting important work, and could they come back tomorrow. They obeyed and came back later. Nothing could get in the way of the music. Not even the needs of the president of the United States of America. The artist always came first.

Clive was one of those rare all-rounders. He could play “any position”. His knowledge and understanding of the music industry went well beyond his creative fluency. He was equally at home dealing with matters of law, finance, radio promotion and marketing. While at Arista, we were invited to meet with the Artist Formerly Known as **Prince** (<https://www.billboard.com/artist/prince/>), as he was calling himself at that time. He was in a dispute with his label, Warner Records, and was looking to release a new album (*Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*) and wanted Clive to take on the project. We were summoned to the suite that Prince was staying in, which happened to be at the Trump International Hotel in New York. We were met at

the suite door by Prince's bodyguard, who ushered us in. The suite was pitch dark, with Prince sitting quietly in the darkness. He was going through a phase where he did not want to be exposed to light. The only way we knew that it was him was in identifying his voice.

We stumbled our way into the club chairs in the room and proceeded to spend the next few hours in total darkness, discussing not the album that he was working on, but various aspects of copyright law. Prince felt that the existing law was generally not fair to artists and wanted to engage with Clive on the subject. Clive proved totally up to the task with a lively debate ensuing. Clive had such a broad grasp of the world of music that he could engage on any subject. Prince was so energized by the discussion that we left with a commitment that he would give the album to Arista for release.

Clive's commitment to our industry never waned. Over the years, I was constantly asked the question, "When will Clive retire? Why is he still working?"

My answer was always the same: "For the love of music."



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