

BOOKING CONCENTRATION IN THE AMERICAN SMOOTH
JAZZ MARKETFestival Stats and
Studies

A statistical analysis of booking concentration in the American smooth jazz market, 1991–2026. Compiled from the festivals' own published records.

THE COUNT

Total bookings per artist across ten major smooth jazz festivals, cruises and concert series in the United States selected for this study, 2006–2026.

Berks Jazz Fest (1991–2026) and Catalina JazzTrax (1987–2026) are counted across their full histories.

1. Rick Braun		103	28 of 35 Berks editions
2. Peter White		100	23 JazzTrax, 1991–2026
3. Brian Culbertson		95	23 Berks · hosts his own Napa event
4. Richard Elliot		92	20 Berks · 12 Newport Beach
5. Gerald Albright		82	21 Berks editions
6. Jonathan Butler		71	15 Smooth Jazz Cruises

7. Boney James		70	<i>20 Berks</i>
8. Eric Darius		67	<i>14 Seabreeze</i>
9. Mindi Abair		67	<i>19 Catalina JazzTrax</i>
10. Kirk Whalum		64	<i>17 Berks editions</i>

One appearance = one artist on one event's bill in one year, billed solo or inside a package such as Jazz Attack, BWB, RnR, Guitars & Saxes or West Coast Jam.

TEN FACTS

I **Rick Braun has played 28 of the 35 Berks Jazz Fests ever held.**

Eighty per cent of every edition since 1991 – and every single year from 2006 to 2026 without a break. Taken from the festival's own published artists-history page.

II **Gerald Veasley has played 29 of those 35.**

Every edition from 1997 to 2026 except 2010, in the recovered lineups. The last sixteen in a row, 2011–2026.

III **Ten artists account for 811 bookings across the ten major smooth jazz events in this study.**

Berks, Seabreeze, Catalina JazzTrax, Capital Jazz, Newport Beach, Long Beach, the Napa Valley Jazz Getaway, the Smooth Jazz Cruise, the Dave Koz Cruise and the Thornton Winery Champagne Jazz Series, 2006–2026 (Berks and Catalina JazzTrax across their full histories).

IV

One artist alone accounts for more than a hundred of them.

Rick Braun, 103. Peter White, 100. Brian Culbertson, 95. Richard Elliot, 92. Three men – Braun, White and Elliot – hold 295 bookings between them.

V

Mindi Abair played the Catalina JazzTrax Festival eleven years running.

2006 through 2016 without missing an edition, then 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Sixteen appearances at a single festival.

VI

On a typical major smooth jazz bill, 8.6 of the genre's top twenty artists appear.

Out of twenty. Book one festival and you have booked nearly half the recognised tier of an entire American music genre.

VII

58% of artist-festival pairings repeat inside a three-year window.

Twenty-four pairings ran three consecutive years without a break. The bills rotate. The pool does not.

VIII

Seven commercial radio operations in America air smooth jazz full-time.

WSBZ Destin, WEIB Northampton, WAEG Augusta, WJZA/WNSY Atlanta, WDJZ Daytona Beach, KHUK Granite Shoals and KJAV McAllen (September 2026). The *M Street Journal* counted 64 stations in 1989 and 43 in 1994, as reported in *Billboard*; most major-market stations left the format between 2006 and 2010. Country radio had 2,134 stations in February 2026 (Inside Radio/PrecisionTrak). Full list: [Smooth Jazz Radio, Counted](#).

IX

A No. 1 smooth jazz record needed 225 spins a week on 13 stations.

Mediabase published smooth jazz panel, week ending 5 September 2026: No. 1 drew 225 spins on 13 stations, about 17 plays per station; No. 30 drew 93 spins on 11 stations. Billboard's Smooth Jazz Airplay chart lists 30 positions and has been compiled from Mediabase data since November 2022; its legend describes a panel of 15 stations.

X

One booking agent represents nine of the top twenty artists.

A second agency holds four more. Thirteen of the twenty are booked from two desks.

FINDINGS

1

Booking concentration.

Across the ten major smooth jazz events in this study, ten artists account for **811 bookings**. One artist accounts for **103** of them. Three – Braun, White and Elliot – account for **295 between them**.

2

Representation concentration.

Two booking desks control **thirteen of the top twenty artists**; a single agent represents nine. The same names recur across festivals under no

common ownership, which locates the concentration upstream of the buyer – in representation, not in programming.

3 **Recurrence exceeds selection.**

58% of artist-event pairings repeat inside a three-year window, and twenty-four pairings ran three consecutive years without a break. At Berks, one artist appears on **28 of 35 editions**. A booking process with genuine annual turnover does not produce this distribution.

4 **Demand in this market is endogenous.**

The draw cited to justify a booking was itself produced by the bookings before it – promoted by the same festivals, played on a chart panel of thirteen to fifteen stations, sold to the same returning audience. Supply and demand are not independent variables here. **Each year's booking manufactures the evidence used to justify the next.**

5 **The counterfactual is never tested.**

An artist who is not booked generates no attendance data, and the absence of that data is then read as absence of demand. There is no control group. The proposition that the incumbent roster is the optimal roster has never been subjected to a test capable of falsifying it.

6 **The configuration is contracting on its own terms.**

The format's commercial terrestrial base has contracted from **64 stations in 1989** to **seven full-time operations in 2026**. The buyer pool has shrunk: two of the ten events studied are dark or unconfirmed for 2026.

Conclusion. These figures do not establish that the incumbent artists lack drawing power; several demonstrably have it. They establish something

narrower and more durable – that this market’s booking behaviour is better explained by **recurrence than by selection**; that its demand signal is generated inside the same system that signal is used to justify; and that this closed configuration has coincided with severe contraction in the format’s audience and infrastructure.

Whatever else it is, **it is not a market discovering artists.**

Compiled from published festival artist histories, archived lineup pages and the Internet Archive. Berks Jazz Fest figures are taken from the festival’s own artists-history page. Radio and chart figures: Mediabase published smooth jazz chart, week ending 5 September 2026; Billboard Smooth Jazz Airplay (30 positions; panel per chart legend); M Street Journal counts as reported in Billboard, 1 April 1995; Inside Radio/PrecisionTrak format counts, February 2026; station licence and format records listed on the Radio page. Where a year’s lineup could not be recovered it was excluded rather than estimated, so every count here is a floor, not a ceiling.

FESTIVAL STATS AND STUDIES

Compiled August 2026

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