

How to search for Music rights holders

When you need to clear a song, you first need to know the rights holders of a song. There are different ways to figure it out.

A - on tracksandfields.com

If the track is on tracksandfields.com, you will likely find that information there. This applies for master and copyright information

1. Go to MUSIC --> BROWSE and search for the track

Our example is "Starboy" by the Weeknd.



2. Check the details of the track by clicking on the title



3. On the details page, there are 2 places where you can find the publisher information

a) the owner of the track (i.e. the user the track belongs to): if the owner is a publisher you know who the publisher (or at least one of the publishers) is. Sometimes, in the track search (step 1) there are already several results (which may be the same track, but uploaded by different users). In such case, the other uploads might belong to other publishers (or the label). You should also check these. If it is a label, then you would know the master right owner (on the master side there is usually only 1 owner, whereas on the copyright side there could be more, as different authors are each represented by a different publisher).

Beware that the user doesn't have to be a rights owner. Particularly independent tracks are often uploaded by agents. Also, it might be that the uploader only has limited representation rights (e.g. only for the master and only for USA). If you are unsure, ask your colleagues for advice, or double check via method B.

In our example we see that the track belongs to Songs Publishing (which seems to be one of the publishers).



b) the second place in the track details is the copyright section. If publishers or label are set, they will be displayed here. In our example only the writers are mentioned.

B - via web research

If method A wasn't successful, or if you have a song on tracksandfields.com you want to assign to the correct rightsholder (owner) account, but don't know which, you need to research the information on the web.

Copyright side:

For doing a database search the best method is to search by title and author/writer. Usually, you know the title (as you are searching for it), but not (yet) the writers.

In our example we actually know the writers from the track details page on tracksandfields.com, but just assume they are not there.

I. Finding the writers

The easiest way is to do a Google search. Just try e.g. "Starboy the Weeknd song written by".

it will list several options:

a) Wikipedia

For famous songs it will most likely give you a wikipedia page of the song. There on the right side it lists the writers



Whenever you find information during the research, please update the entry on tracksandfields.com. This way you (or your colleagues) don't need to research the same information again.

So, in our example, there seem to be some writers missing. So we update these on the track details page.



b) lyrics pages

There are some lyrics pages which would also show up in the search results, e.g. [azlyrics](https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/weeknd/starboy.html). For our example when going to <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/weeknd/starboy.html> you will see:



As you can see here, sometimes the information may not match (in our example Jason Quenneville is missing), so it's not clear yet which information is correct. For later search we should focus on the writers we know for sure (i.e. the ones that several sources listed).

Also song information pages like [songfacts](https://www.songfacts.com) have a lyrics section that may contain that information. For our example,

<https://www.songfacts.com/lyrics/the-weeknd/starboy> will show:



Apart from the writers it also tells you the publishers. Also here, Quenneville is not mentioned.

If you only wanted to assign the track to one of the publishers you could stop here. In that example, it is best to assign it to the well-known major (Universal Music Publishing), as these for sure have sub-publishers in all main territories, which are still part of the same group (e.g. Universal Music Publishing Germany). For smaller tracks it can be that the sub-publisher for a certain territory is a third party (and actually from the information we have it's not sure which publishers and/or sub-publishers are listed).

We insert the publisher information to the track details. If later research proves otherwise, we just update the record.



II. Finding the copyright owners

Now that we know the writers we can proceed with searching for the copyright owners.

Most collection societies have databases of the works registered with them (some with more, some with less appealing interfaces). You can typically find them by naming the collection society and then add 'database search', so for France (with SACEM as collection society) you google "SACEM database search".

For our research, we recommend checking on GEMA (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), PRS (UK), ASCAP (USA) or BMI (USA).

As particularly famous tracks are represented by local sub-publishers it is best to search in the database applying to the license territory. If the license is neither of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, UK or USA, please use the GEMA database for reference.

GEMA (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)

The GEMA works search is available here: <https://online.gema.de/werke/search.faces?lang=en> (in case the URL changed, please google "GEMA Werksuche" and update this page accordingly).

We type the title and then select "writer/publisher" as search dimension and enter one of the writers (In our example we take the Weeknd himself, Abel Tesfaye):



The search with our example yields 6 results. Check for the one that matches the title, and contains the writers you have researched before. The correct entry usually also has an ISWC (international standard work code) entered. Other entries may be edits of the song, incorrect (double or incomplete) entries etc.

For our example it is the second one:



The entry also contains Jason Quenneville as writer, so the information seems to be correct.

You will see the publishers listed at the bottom. As it is a foreign work (in our example a US copyright that has an entry in the German database), it lists the original publishers and the local (=German) sub-publishers. The original publishers and sub-publishers are grouped, so "prescription songs" is the original publisher to Kobalt being the sub-publisher.

By clicking on the link of "sub-publisher" you see the contact details of each. More importantly it will tell you, if e.g. a sub-publisher name which doesn't sound familiar in first place actually belongs to e.g. one of the major publishers.

As for the contact details, as long as you have an up to date contact of the publisher (e.g. Kobalt) rely on this (and not the database entry, as these are often outdated).

When clicking all of them you find:



So, Universal/MCA is a catalogue of Universal Publishing. Then we have Kobalt 2x (representing 2 different writers, that's why they have 2 entries), Rückbank and Anthem. The Original publisher to Anthem is Anthem McKinney, so it is the publisher of one of the writer Martin McKinney.

So we have: Universal Publishing, Kobalt, Anthem and Rückbank

PRS (UK)

The PRS database search works very similar. Go to <https://searchworks.prsformusic.com> (or google "PRS database search" in case the link isn't up to date - and update the link in this post here).

You will need a login, which Steve can give it to you.

Same search pattern here (title and writer surname):



For our example it just shows 1 result.



The ISWC is the same is in the GEMA search, so it should be the correct entry. Click on the title.

It will show you the writers and who represents them (for UK). The letters show you the representation connection (Bangalter = D is published by Concord UK = D):



So, here we have Universal Music Publishing, Kobalt, Concord and Anthem.

When you click on "Full ownership chain" you will see the whole chain from the original publisher to its sub-publisher, and its sub-publisher...

Here you could e.g. see that the publisher for Because is Concord in UK (and apparently Rückbank in Germany, as because is mentioned as original publisher there):



ASCAP, BMI (USA)

The searches for ASCAP (<https://www.ascap.com/repertory#/>) and BMI (<https://repertoire.bmi.com/>) have a combined database (Songview). They work in the same fashion as described above.

For our example, there is one question remaining: Why is the owner of the song on tracksandfields.com "Songs Publishing" ? The answer is one of the reasons why finding rights holder information is tricky: Songs publishing was sold to Kobalt (<https://www.billboard.com/pro/songs-music-publishing-sells-catalog-kobalt-exclusive/#!>) so the information on tracksandfields.com is simply outdated.

So, in order to have our song data on tracksandfields.com correct, we should do the following: We update the track details for the publishers: Universal Music Publishing, Kobalt, Rückbank, and Anthem.



Then we assign the track to Universal Publishing (or Kobalt).



We choose Universal publishing as new owner:



Beware the difference between master and publishing side. Whereas Universal Music Germany is the label, the publisher is Universal Music Publishing. Equally Sony Music Germany/ Sony Music Entertainment Germany is the label,

Sony Music Publishing is the publisher. Don't mix these up. If you are unsure, ask your colleagues.

==> Universal Music Publishing, Kobalt, Rückbank, and Anthem are the copyright owners to the example song.

Other PROs

It may be necessary to research certain authors on other PRO databases. Here are listed some that have a public database to search.

Netherlands (BUMA/STEMRA): <https://bumastemra.nl/en/about/titelcatalogus/>

Poland (ZAIKS): <https://online.zaiks.org.pl/utwory-muzyczne>

Master side:

Wikipedia

With the same search term as for the copyright, or just "The weeknd Starboy song wikipedia" you will reach the wikipedia page. On the right (apart from the writers which were explained in the copyright section) you will also find the label.



As it is a famous song and the labels don't sound familiar, it's highly likely that these are sub-labels of one of the majors. Just click and check.

In our example, when clicking on Republic, it will take you to this Wikipedia page:



It states that it is owned by Universal Music Group. So we have the rights holder on the master side.

Whenever you find information during the research, please update the entry on tracksandfields.com. This way you (or your colleagues) don't need to research the same information again.



Spotify

You can also search on spotify. Just search for the song and then click to get to the release of the song.



Scroll down to the bottom. Here you will usually find the information:



"UMG Recordings" means Universal Music Group Recordings. So Universal Music.

Apple Music and other streaming / Music services

You can e.g. also research the information on apple music. You also find the information at the bottom:



Collection societies databases for recordings

Similar to the databases of works by the collection societies there also exists databases for recordings for the sister societies (e.g. GVL is the sister society for GEMA in Germany, PPL of PRS in UK), as also neighboring rights generate royalties that need to be collected.

We recommend using PPL (<https://repsearch.ppluk.com/>).

Search for the artist and wait until the results appear. Select the artist



For the recording title you can typically leave it as is (not selecting any of the search results:



As a result you will see the different releases registered at PPL (UK). For tracks that became famous the database also lists the initial release by a small label and the re-release by a major label (the major licensed the rights from the smaller label to make a bigger release). In such case, the owner is always the bigger one (in that case the major label).

Our example is quite straightforward:



==> Master owner of the example song is Universal Music