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Sinach wins ₦5 billion copyright battle over “Way Maker”

On 24 July 2026, The Federal High Court, Lagos division delivered a judgement in Michael Oluwole v. Osinachi Joseph Egbu with suit number FHC/L/CS/402/2024. Music producer Michael Oluwole popularly known as Maye had earlier filed a lawsuit in 2024 against Nigerian gospel musician popularly known as Sinach regarding her global song “Way Maker”. The suit claimed co-authorship, co-ownership, and performance rights, seeking equitable revenue distribution from licensing fees, ₦5 billion in general damages, among other reliefs. Sinach countered that the song was fully composed and publicly performed before Oluwole’s brief technical engagement under an oral contract.

Delivering the judgment, Hon. Justice A. Lewis-Allagoo dismissed the suit in its entirety describing the case as

“gold-digging and unmeritorious.” The Court ruled that providing post-production services specifically mixing and mastering an already existing composition does not grant a producer co-authorship status.

Authorship under copyright law strictly requires contributing original expressive content to the composition itself, not merely rendering paid technical assistance.

This decision establishes a crucial judicial boundary between creative compositional authorship and technical production services. Studio personnel cannot claim proprietary rights or backend royalties based on technical assistance alone, underscoring the critical necessity of executed work-for-hire agreements for all recording sessions. Finally this case underscores the importance of executing an agreement in writing as the contract between the singer and the producer was an oral agreement which perhaps might have been the reason for the confusion as to ownership because the terms of engagement were not properly spelt out.

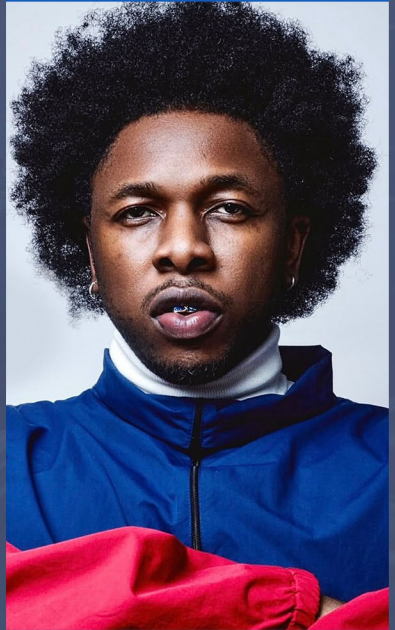


Runtown ordered to return to Eric Many and pay about ₦319 million

Record label Eric Many Limited brought action against Afrobeats artist Douglas Jack Agu (Runtown) before the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The label alleged multiple contractual breaches under their June 2016 recording agreement, including unauthorized collaborations, side releases, unapproved bookings, and the artist's attempt to independently register his stage name as a trademark.

As part of the ongoing dispute, Justice O. A. Musa delivered a ruling on the 16th day of July 2026 that the 2016 recording contract remained valid, unexpired, and enforceable, ruling that Runtown failed to lawfully terminate the deal. The Court granted specific performance ordering the singer to fulfill his remaining recording obligations, including delivering a full-length album and affirmed Eric Many's proprietary rights in the "RUNTOWN" mark. Runtown was ordered to pay approximately ₦319 million, comprising ₦266.7 million in unrecovered label investments, ₦50 million in general damages, and ₦3 million in legal costs.

This ruling underscores the binding nature of exclusivity and recoupment obligations in Nigerian record deals. For talent and management, it serves as a stark warning:



self-help remedies and premature exit strategies without formal judicial determination or contractual release expose artists to crippling financial liabilities and loss of brand ownership.

Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON) v. Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC)

The Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON) filed an interlocutory appeal challenging a Federal High Court ruling that refused to restrain the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) from interfering with its operations. The underlying suit challenged aspects of the Copyright (Collective Management Organisations) Regulations 2007. COSON sought an interim order to halt regulator intervention and protect its operational status as a collective management organization (CMO) pending final determination of the substantive lawsuit.

In a unanimous decision delivered by Justice Polycarp Terna Kwahar, the Court of Appeal (Lagos Division) dismissed COSON's appeal and awarded ₦200,000 in costs against the Society. The Court ruled that because COSON's operational license had already been suspended and subsequently expired prior to the suit, there was no valid, subsisting approval left to preserve via injunction. Granting an interlocutory injunction under such circumstances would illegitimately alter the status quo rather than preserve it.

This appellate decision reinforces the statutory authority of the NCC over CMO

licensing and regulatory compliance. For rightsholders and music users, it brings critical clarity to royalty licensing: an unapproved or expired CMO cannot rely on court-ordered interlocutory relief to legitimize ongoing collection efforts, reaffirming that formal regulatory compliance is non-negotiable for collective rights administration in Nigeria



Africa Music Business Roundtable (AMBR) 2026

From 16 to 18 July 2026, Lagos hosted the Africa Music Business Roundtable (AMBR 2.0), convening global music executives, legal scholars, technology innovators, policymakers, and rights administrators. Driven by industry leaders including Michael Odiong (CEO of Premier Records Limited and Premier Music Publishing Company Limited and co-founder of the Africa Music Business Roundtable) and Dr. Chinedu Chukwuji (former CEO of the Copyright

Society of Nigeria (COSON), the conference aimed to bridge the gap between Afrobeats' global cultural explosion and the internal financial and legal structures needed to retain value within the African continent.

Panel discussions and keynote sessions centered on transforming the African music ecosystem into a fully monetized,

transparent market. Key thematic areas included:

AI & Copyright Integrity: Evaluating the legal implications of generative AI on creative ownership, licensing, and unauthorized vocal cloning.

Data-Driven Transparency & Collection: Implementing tech-enabled data tracking to optimize royalty flow and streamline collective management operations.

Institutional Investment & Securitization: Exploring music IP securitization and

structured private equity financing to reduce reliance on foreign advances.

Policy & Gatekeeping: Formulating standardized legal frameworks to eliminate digital gatekeeping and build sustainable grassroots infrastructure.

The roundtable highlighted a crucial inflection point for entertainment counsel: global creative success must be matched by sophisticated local deal structures, robust IP protection, and transparent royalty monetization frameworks to keep African music capital anchored within the continent.



Musical Copyright Society of Nigeria (MCSN) warns businesses over alleged fake music licences

In August 2026, the Musical Copyright Society Nigeria Ltd/Gte (MCSN) issued an explicit public warning targeting commercial music users, including hotels, event centers, lounges, discotheques, and broadcasting entities. MCSN cautioned these businesses against making copyright royalty payments to unauthorized organizations, specifically pointing to collection demands made on behalf of the Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON).

MCSN emphasized its status as the sole government-approved Collective Management Organization (CMO) authorized by the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) to grant public performance licenses for musical works in Nigeria. Citing the Court of Appeal's recent dismissal of COSON's interlocutory appeal against the NCC, MCSN reiterated that COSON operates without a valid, subsisting regulatory license. Consequently, MCSN warned that commercial entities procuring music licenses from unapproved entities remain fully liable for copyright infringement and face imminent legal enforcement.

For hospitality and media operators, this public notice underscores the imperative of strict regulatory due diligence prior to remitting royalty fees. In Nigeria's evolving collective management landscape, paying royalties to an unlicensed entity offers no legal indemnity against infringement suits brought by the lawfully recognized CMO.



Shallipopi, Seyi Vibe, and T.I Blaze vs Dapper Music

In August 2026, prominent Afrobeats artists Shallipopi, Seyi Vibe, and T.I Blaze publicly accused music executive Damilola Akinwunmi (Dapper) and Dapper Music, of financial mismanagement and contractual breaches. The artists alleged unpaid streaming royalties (including Shallipopi's claim of over \$1 million withheld across 46 tracks), unauthorized third-party IP licensing, side-account diversions, and signature forgery on contract addendums. By September 2026, Shallipopi announced he would cease public commentary on legal advice following formal petitions submitted to law enforcement, including the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

In response, Dapper Music denied all criminal and breach-of-contract allegations, demanding an independent forensic financial audit by a top-tier accounting firm (e.g., KPMG, PwC, or Deloitte). The label countered that the artists' accounts reflected unrecouped master and marketing investments, emphasizing that raw gross streaming numbers cannot be conflated with net distributable revenue due to mandatory DSP platform fees, distribution cuts, and contractually agreed recoupment deductions. The matter highlights the legal



threshold between civil contractual accounting disputes and criminal fraud/forgery investigations.

This high-profile feud underscores the critical need for audit-rights clauses, transparent royalty accounting, and standardized chain-of-title verification in master distribution deals. For labels and talent alike, it illustrates how unaligned expectations regarding recoupment math, marketing expenses, and distribution deductions can rapidly escalate into severe regulatory, criminal, and brand-damaging litigation.

National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) moves against movie “Living in Colours”

In late August 2026, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) intervened to stop the planned premiere of the web series "Living in Colours", directed by Tega Idogho and screenplay by Udo Casciavit. NFVCB's

Director-General Shaibu Hussein stated the production contained prohibited sexual content and promoted same-sex

relationships in violation of the NFVCB Act and the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 issuing warnings to exhibitors and venue owners against hosting the screening. The regulatory action followed the circulation of promotional materials and a trailer online announcing dates and venues for the film's premiere.

Central to the Board's position was the fact that the movie had not been submitted to the NFVCB for vetting or classification prior to scheduling its public exhibition. Under the National Film and Video Censors Board Act, the distribution or public screening of any motion picture content without prior

statutory vetting and classification

constitutes a regulatory offense. The Board asserted its mandate to enforce national classification guidelines, warning that non-compliant screening venues face severe administrative sanctions, including potential operational license revocations.

Industry stakeholders, filmmakers, and

content creators must pay strict attention to regulatory pre-clearance requirements before publicizing premiere dates or distribution schedules. Creators should focus on producing legally compliant content and actively promote lawful, constructive, and educational causes within the creative ecosystem.



AGF calls on NCC to prepare for AI and streaming



In August 2026, speaking at a special send-off party organised by the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) for its past directors-general and retired directors in Abuja, the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Prince Lateef Fagbemi (SAN) through a representative (Director, Legal Drafting, Federal Ministry of Justice, Dr. Patrick Etta Oyong), charged the NCC to modernize its regulatory and enforcement operations to address technological disruptions in the creative industry. Speaking on policy

directives for rights protection, the AGF highlighted that rapid shifts in digital streaming models and the rise of artificial intelligence require a proactive legal approach to safeguard local creators and intellectual property investments.

The AGF's directives emphasize adapting statutory frameworks and operational enforcement to digital ecosystems, urging the NCC to develop legal mechanisms to address issues surrounding AI-generated content, moving away from traditional physical piracy raids toward tech-driven cyber-enforcement, adding that the NCC's work would become increasingly important to National development.

The AGF's mandate signals an upcoming legislative and regulatory pivot toward digital enforcement and AI governance in Nigeria. Entertainment lawyers and media companies must monitor upcoming NCC guidelines on digital platform liabilities and AI IP integration, structuring licensing agreements and tech distribution models to align with heightened regulatory oversight.

Nigeria Police Force Proposes Specialised IP and Creative Economy Desk

In September 2026, the Inspector-General of Police proposed the establishment of a dedicated "Orange Economy Security and Intellectual Property Coordination Desk" within the Nigeria Police Force. Designed to operate alongside existing law enforcement structures, the proposed desk aims to bridge the gap between criminal police

enforcement and regulatory bodies like the Nigerian Copyright Commission, offering targeted security interventions for Nigeria's rapidly expanding creative sector.

The proposed desk establishes a specialized law enforcement framework to address

physical, digital, and operational security challenges across creative industries. Key focus areas include deploying

intelligence-led policing against organized physical piracy, commercial counterfeiting, and cyber-enabled digital IP theft. Beyond enforcement, the desk aims to formalize police protocols for securing film locations, outdoor concerts, and festivals, while

upgrading force-wide capabilities in digital evidence preservation to better investigate online infringement and fraud.

For entertainment lawyers, event promoters, and film production companies, the establishment of a specialized police IP desk

offers a more structured mechanism to enforce IP rights and secure physical assets. Production teams and brand managers should leverage these evolving law

enforcement channels to safeguard live events, streamline location security, and pursue swift criminal remedies against physical and digital piracy.



Federal Government Engages Bolloré Group on Creative Economy and Digital Media Expansion

On 18 September 2026, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu held high-level strategic bilateral talks in Paris with Vincent Bolloré, Chairman of the Bolloré Group. The discussions focused on accelerating foreign direct investment across Nigeria's creative, entertainment, fiber optics, and digital infrastructure sectors. The Bolloré Group holds major media and distribution interests globally, including Canal+, MultiChoice Group, and Universal Music Group.

The meeting centered on expanding foreign capital deployment and deepening local operations within the Nigerian entertainment landscape. The Bolloré Group committed to increasing local content investment and infrastructure development across film, music distribution, and broadcasting, leveraging Canal+'s integration with MultiChoice to scale regional production. Deliberations also highlighted expanding fiber-optic networks to optimize streaming delivery, reduce latency, and counter unauthorized digital distribution across West Africa. President Tinubu framed the engagement around the administration's "Renewed Hope" agenda, positioning Nigeria as an operational base for global media conglomerates while ensuring more value



underscores a maturing investment

landscape for African creative assets. Legal counsel and entertainment executives must anticipate stricter regulatory compliance around foreign ownership structures, local content quotas, intellectual property licensing models, and cross-border distribution deals as global conglomerates deepen their physical footprint in Nigeria.

Sony Music sues AI music generator Udio over alleged use of 30,000+ recordings

In July 2026, Sony Music Entertainment filed a major second copyright lawsuit in the United State of America against Uncharted Labs, Inc., the artificial intelligence startup behind Udio. After the federal court presiding over the initial 2024 industry lawsuit declined to permit a late stage amendment adding tens of thousands of newly identified copyrighted works, Sony initiated an independent action. The suit explicitly identifies 30,117 additional sound recordings that Udio allegedly copied without authorization to train its generative music models.

The lawsuit escalates the legal and financial stakes for AI developers, with Sony seeking maximum statutory damages of \$150,000 per infringed recording, alongside additional penalties for circumvention of digital rights management safeguards. It is also important to note that Sony now stands as the sole major record label pursuing active copyright litigation against Udio, after competitors Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group reached

out-of-court settlements and executed commercial licensing deals. Sony argues that the willingness of other market participants to enter paid licensing agreements refutes Udio's defence that training machine learning models on commercial music constitutes non-infringing fair use under federal copyright law.

Sony's refusal to settle underscores a strategic rift within the recorded music sector over AI governance. While some rightsholders are opting for immediate licensing partnerships, Sony is pressing for judicial determinations that could establish binding precedents regarding whether mass ingestion of protected catalogs for AI training constitutes direct infringement. For entertainment and technology lawyers, this case serves as a critical barometer for valuation models, fair-use boundaries, and liability exposure in generative AI development.



Sony Music Publishing and Warner Chappell Music v. Anthropic PBC

In late August 2026, music publishing giants Sony Music Publishing and Warner Chappell Music joined forces to file a

multi-billion-dollar federal copyright lawsuit against AI company Anthropic PBC, the

creator of the Claude AI models. The

complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, names

Anthropic alongside executives Dario Amodei and Benjamin Mann personally. The publishers characterize Anthropic's unauthorized

acquisition and deployment of copyrighted musical compositions as one of the largest systematic intellectual property

infringements in history.

The lawsuit focuses directly on the acquisition methods and ingestion mechanics behind Anthropic's model training pipeline.

The complaint alleges that Anthropic illegally downloaded millions of copyrighted works via BitTorrent from illicit repositories like Library Genesis (LibGen) and Pirate Library Mirror,

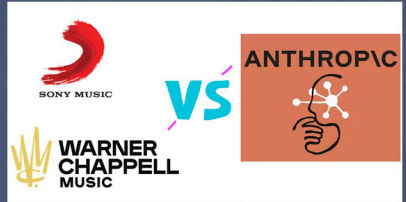
including hundreds of songbooks and sheet music collections. The suit further claims

Anthropic scraped lyrics directly from

licensed websites like MusixMatch and

LyricFind in violation of their terms of service.

The publishers allege that Anthropic



systematically stripped out Copyright Management Information (CMI) such as

songwriter credits and copyright notices prior to model training. The suit asserts that Claude memorized these compositions,

outputting near verbatim lyrics and

generating market-substituting derivative works that directly compete with music

publishers and dilute songwriter royalty pools.

This landmark litigation underscores that technology developers cannot rely on broad fair-use arguments when training datasets are constructed from unlicensed or pirated sources. For music publishers, songwriters, and AI developers, the case highlights that

input-side data sourcing, CMI removal, and unauthorized model memorization represent major liability exposure points that threaten the underlying economic value of music

publishing catalogs.