

# Entertainment WEEKLY

December 8, 2017

1.5M Print, 29M Online

## Music

Edited by | NOLAN FEENEY @NOLANFEENEY



## MUSIC GETS GRAPHIC

The worlds of music and comic books are colliding with increased frequency—and star power. BY CHRISTIAN HOLUB

MUSIC IS A GENRE OF SOUND and passion, full of artists transforming their pain and love into sonic power. Comics are a genre of ink and paper, where creators use words and pictures to visualize fantasies of what never was and never could be. Recently, the two art forms have intersected for an unprecedented number of high-wattage projects, with some musicians, like hip-hop duo Rae Sremmurd, popping up in the pages of storied comics, and others, like the Weeknd, building entirely new comic universes and characters inspired by their own established personas: In October, Marvel announced that a *Starboy* comic based on the chart-topper

STARBOY: JIM SPELLMAN; SHADOWMAN: VALIANT; COMMON: JIM SPELLMAN; EASTER: JIM SPELLMAN; THE WEEKEND: JIM SPELLMAN; RAE SREMMURD: JIM SPELLMAN

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## NOTEWORTHY

• **Party Crashers** Charli XCX announced her new mixtape, *Pop2*, which arrives Dec. 15 and features collaborations with Carly Rae Jepsen, Tove Lo, MØ, and many others.

will arrive in 2018. No matter how music and comics intersect, these crossover projects offer rich, immersive experiences that appeal to performers who like to be hands-on in all aspects of their art. "Comics have a unique point of view that can be very beneficial to adapting music," says Dinesh Shamdasani, CEO of Valiant Entertainment, which published an issue of the *Shadowman* series starring Rae Sremmurd this past October. "We're able to bring the emotions of music into the visual medium more robustly than film."

The intersection of music and comics isn't new (see sidebar): In the '70s, Marvel started developing a superhero called *Danzler* based on disco singers—at one point, there were plans for a five-album—and more recently, the *Ramones* headed to *Riverdale* in a 2016 issue from Archie Comics. Yet for some artists, like electropop songwriter Lights, the interplay goes even further and deeper; telling a story through comics is a natural extension of the creative process.

Lights' *Slim & Barry* project consists of her fourth studio album (released in September) as well as a six-part comic-book series of the same name (whose final issue arrives Dec. 13) that she wrote and illustrated. The series tells the story of Enma Jin, a red-head who looks a lot like Lights and travels through a dystopian world stricken with disease and inequality. Each song on the album corresponds to a different part of the comics and explores its themes.

"Drawing is very similar to making music," says Lights (real

name: Valerie Anne Pozeitner). "You start with a skeletal idea of how you want the page to go or what you want the song to be about. Then you start to ink in the lines—adding bass, drums, or melodic ideas.... By the end you fill in all the colors and all the sounds, and you have a finished page or song."

Though he won't be illustrating his comics counterpart as Lights does, Common also jumped at the chance to be a part of the tradition of joining together music and graphic storytelling when web comics company LINE Webtoon approached him about collaborating. He's now set to make companion music for *Caster*, a series debuting in 2018 about an



LIGHTS



antiques dealer who's caught up in mystical conspiracies and whose likeness is based on the rapper.

"Comic books have influenced people from all walks of life, including people from the music world, and specifically the hip-hop culture," Common says. "So many times me and other artists have referenced graphic-novel characters and superheroes that we saw in comic books." For him, thinking about how his music could exist in another medium helps sharpen his message. "Music is a state of mind and a perspective," he says, "and that's what you get from graphic novels: who that person is, what their power is. What is your power as an MC? Are you a dope freestyler? Do you write incredible stories? Or are you clever with your metaphors? That's where you find the synergy."

Also? It's just plain fun to be in a comic. That was the main draw for Rae Sremmurd. "[The band's Slim Jxmmi is a comic-book fan who had been turned onto Valiant by his lawyer," Shamdasani says. "He really liked our books and approached us about doing something cool. They were incredibly open during the whole process. I believe Jxmmi's response [to the final product] was something like, 'It's f---ing fire.'"

Every musician hopes their music will outlast them, and now they have multiple mediums in which to leave a legacy. Says Common: "It opens up a world to do really cool things. Anytime you think of yourself as a graphic-novel character, you feel good. Even if you're the villain, you're being drawn up in a comic book—it's incredible!"

## DRAWN TOGETHER

Notable moments in music/comics crossover history



### KISS

A 1977 Marvel comic featured the band—and their blood mixed into the ink.



### AEROSMITH

Steven Tyler battled evil in a 1993 Valiant comic starring the rockers.



### GHOSTFACE KILLAH

The MC named his 1996 debut *Ironman* and sometimes calls himself Tony Starks.



### NF DOOM

The rapper has long covered his visage with a mask based on Marvel villain Doctor Doom.