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ENTERTAINMENT

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Contracts for kids: The legal side of reality music TV contracts





FRANK OCEAN WILL 'SWIM GOOD,' BUT IS HIS NEW INDEPENDENT RECORD LEGALLY ALL GOOD?



While Miss Mulatto is letting the public know there's "[No More Talking](#)" since she signed to Atlanta recording company So So Def, there should be plenty of legal talk happening before child rappers sign up for Lifetime's "[The Rap Game](#)."

Jermaine Dupri, the producer and owner of So So Def, researched what child rappers were popular on social media (ex. YouTube) before narrowing down which ones to make it to the final five. In Season 1, along with winner Miss Mulatto, the cast of artists were Young Lyric, Lil' Niqo, Supa Peach and Lil Poopy. In the current season, Season 2's artists are Jayla Marie, J.I. aka "The Prince of New York," Lil' Key, Mani and Nia Kay.

Along with Dupri and a host of artists who come in to surprise and advise the young artists, the legendary Queen Latifah and her partner Shakim Compere are executive producers under the Flavor Unit umbrella, alongside Mechelle Collins and Kevin Dill of Intuitive Entertainment.

With all of these big names and a big TV station backing the show, the artists' past and current projects will receive far more exposure than even their previous success as independent artists. Many legal concerns may pop for artists and viewers alike:

- Do the artists still own the legal rights to songs featured before they were on the show, and do they earn a profit if those songs are featured on the show?
- Does the artist have a legal right to market magazine covers, especially those in which (s)he was on the cover? (Example: The Prince of New York won a challenge and the cover of Hip Hop Weekly.)
- Does the artist still own the copyright to song lyrics that are written to match the themes that Dupri gives to them? (Example: The Season 2 cast was assigned to rap about their cities and perform in a combo video for "[My City](#)." Season 1 worked together to create "[Cool With Me](#).")
- Who owns the photo rights to the photos they take, including the photographs picked out with the help of celebrity stylist April Roomet?
- Will the artists receive profits for the video shoots and/or video release?

- Will there be profit deductions for featured artists on their songs during the recording of the show? (Example: Although The Migos just dropped by to offer live performance advice, Season 2 cast members were in a music video with We Are Toonz. In Season 1, Silento showed up to provide advice while the cast's [music video featured 2 Crucial](#).)

As with many other shows that rely on music artists of various ages as the primary entertainment (ex. "The Voice," "American Idol," "Empire," etc.), here are a few legal recommendations that should be covered before signing up.

The artist rarely owns any of the intellectual property developed from the show. If an artist writes an original song as part of the competition segment of a reality TV show, the TV show will most likely own the copyrights to the song and the music video.

All of this may seem like so much for any aspiring artist, much less a child to give up just to break into the music game. The terms of these contracts are difficult to modify. A knowledgeable entertainment lawyer can suggest points to negotiate. For example, ensuring the artist owns rights to songs he or she created before the show. Additionally, the contract should allow the artist to

created before the show. Additionally, the contract should allow the artist to retain all rights to his or her social media profiles and website.



There are ethical implications with these reality competition shows. In most states, minors cannot sign a written contract on their own and need a parent to sign the contract as well. This raises the question of whether the parent is really acting on behalf of the child when the parent signs the contract for their child. Or, is the parent dumping all of the

financial woes onto the child with the added pressure (and sometimes guilt) of succeeding. While broadcasting companies cannot be held morally responsible for a parent's angle, it's good business to make sure that the child artist is voluntarily there and putting his/her heart into it. Otherwise, it'll be frustrating for both the record label and the artist to succeed together in the long run.

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Most of these shows provide the contestant with a lawyer, who usually prioritizes the show's best financial and legal interests. Artists (and their parents) may want to hire an outside lawyer to make sure that the contract works on their behalf, too.

Have more legal questions about child entertainment law? Contact [J. Paye & Associates](#) today.

Shamontiel L. Vaughn contributed to this blog. Find out more about her at [Shamontiel.com](#).

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