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Canadian songwriters made average \$67 on downloads

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The Canadian Press

Ottawa — The body representing Canada's songwriters and composers has revealed that on average musicians writing their own material earned only \$67 last year in royalties from domestic streaming services.

SOCAN, which collects the royalties of musicians including Drake, Joni Mitchell and Down with Webster, said that overall Canadians gained record royalties from streaming platforms last year.

The not-for-profit body collects payments from radio stations, TV stations and digital platforms including Spotify, YouTube and streaming services. It said in a new financial report that for the first time in its history, collections for licensed music are expected to exceed \$416 million a year. Those figures will be confirmed in an annual report in June.

Despite a boost from the pandemic that led more people to stream music at home rather than going out, Canadian songwriters represented by SOCAN earned an average of just \$67.14 in roy-

alties from Canadian digital streaming services in 2021. In an interview with the Canadian Press, CEO Jennifer Brown said while successful artists such as Drake and The Weeknd are played regularly, Canadian musicians who are not as well known can struggle to get promoted in Canada.

She said a law before Parliament that would oblige streaming platforms to add more Canadian music to playlists in Canada would give musicians a career boost and support to get started.

Bill C-11, which is now being debated, would make digital platforms including Spotify and YouTube promote Canadian music in the same way as traditional radio stations, which have to give Canadian music allotted airtime.

But because digital platforms and radio work differently — with platforms allowing people to select what they listen to and when — the bill is likely to give flexibility about how to promote Canadians' work.

Brown said it is important for emerging songwriting talent as well as listeners that platforms "showcase Canadians" to

help them get discovered, and to reach wider audiences.

She predicted that songwriters' earnings from digital platforms will soon overtake royalties from more traditional sources, such as airtime on radio stations.

Brown said the revelation that Canadian musicians earn so little from digital platforms would not convince young artists they want to have a career in music.

The bill would also force digital platforms to contribute financially to supporting musical talent, helping to fund support for "infrastructure" such as recording studios, Brown says.

YouTube has warned that forcing it to promote Canadians' work rather than carefully curated content tailored to individual tastes might not lead to more Canadian content being selected overall.

This could, because of the way its algorithm works, lead to some Canadian content being promoted less actively outside Canada, where many Canadian artists make most of their money.

Michael Geist, the University of Ot-

tawa's Canada Research Chair in internet law, said making platforms “force-feed” Canadian content could suggest it’s less popular than it is, and lead to it being downgraded by streaming platforms’ algorithms. He’s warned the bill could have an impact on the amount of revenue Canadian musicians earn from outside the country on digital platforms.

But Brown says the measures in the bill would not only introduce more listeners to Canadian music they might not have heard of, but boost the royalties Canadian musicians can earn.

The rights management body, whose members include Michael Buble, Gordon Lightfoot and the estate of Leonard Cohen, collected \$135 million last year from the use of music on the internet alone.

It also collected royalties from streaming platforms including Netflix, including for theme tunes penned by Canadian songwriters and composers.