BACKWOODS
RECORDING STUDIO
"Your Music Our Studio"

# HAVE FUN RECORDING YOUR SONG IN THE STUDIO

## Make it Enjoyable and Get a Final Quality Product with These Tips

Tony Ray Jones

# HAVE FUN RECORDING YOUR SONG IN THE STUDIO

## MAKE IT ENJOYABLE AND GET A FINAL QUALITY PRODUCT WITH THESE TIPS

**FROM TONY RAY JONES**

For you aspiring music professionals, I hope that this e-book and insights in it will help you get a clearer sense of how to record your music, as well as provide motivation and inspiration to help you advance your own career. This eBook is a guide, and the purpose of this guide is to do just that – ***guide you***. It takes you through some of most important aspects of recording your music how to get best out of the session.

For you established professionals, I'm quite proud to call you my constituents, and some of you, my colleagues. For as much as I've idolized country music stars *on stage*, I've always admired those industry professionals that make it happen behind the scenes as well.

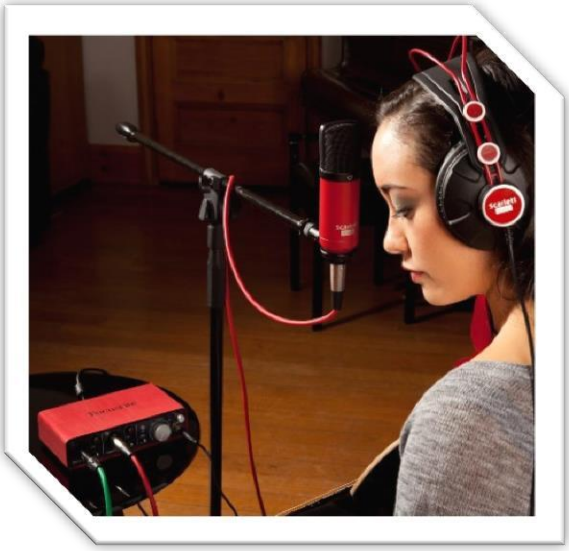
With that in mind, here are my **insights** as reflected upon through my own path to getting here.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# HOME STUDIO OR COMMERCIAL STUDIO

The decision to record your music presents you with the question of *where* to track that music. You may have a digital recorder or computer recording setup in your bedroom, but your project might have outgrown it. You may have a band mate or friend who has a more robust home studio. But if your project is sufficiently large in scope, you might need to look at a commercial project studio to get your music recorded.

So what are the deciding factors? Well, the answer can be a little complex, since often the lines between home/project/professional studios can be blurred, thanks to the advent of quality digital recording systems at all price points. Let's take a look at the basic differences between home and commercial studios to help you decide which to choose for your next project.



## HOME STUDIO

The home studio can be many things. It can be a four-track recorder in a bedroom, connected to a pair of headphones and a microphone. It can be a table top mixer and a laptop with audio interface. It can even be a full-scale, multi-channel recording rig with acoustic treatment. It really depends on the home studio owner's budget.

One question to ask is: *what do I need to gain from my recording?* If the answer is a reference demo, then you'll be able to get by with a lot less gear than if you plan to record the next *White Album*.

Regardless of the size and type of gear, there are a few across-the-board considerations when looking at a home studio.

Some of the pros of home studios include:

- Home studios typically focus on one project at a time, in comparison with commercial studios that might have multiple projects at any given time.

- Home studios may offer lodging and certain creature comforts not found in commercial buildings.
- Home studios are usually less expensive than commercial ones – commercial real estate is expensive.

Some of the cons of home studios include:

- May not have professional acoustical treatment.  May not have cutting-edge gear.
- May not be ideal for all projects - loud drums just won't do in residential neighborhoods.

## COMMERCIAL STUDIOS

Commercial studios can include high end in-home studios, project studios, and professional studios. This is the next step up from the basic home studio. Any business branding itself as a commercial studio should have pro level gear and professional sound treatment throughout its rooms. Commercial studios are generally equipped to handle large projects, such as a five-piece band. The largest of commercial studios are capable of recording symphony orchestras, but for most of us, that's overkill.

The allure of commercial studios is that, when it fits your budget, you can take advantage of the high quality gear and top-notch room treatments typically found in such facilities. But, since commercial studios are sometimes costly, you should be certain you can budget the expense before booking one.

Here are the main pros of commercial studios:

- Usually have more inputs and outputs than home studios.
- Most often have the latest, best gear.
- Should have professional acoustic treatment in all recording and control rooms.
- Typically offer professional engineer as a standard feature or paid option.  Usually have a more robust microphone selection than home studios.

Cons of commercial studios:

- Typically more expensive than home studios.
- Scheduling sometimes difficult due to multiple projects going on.
- May not be available in your area.

- Additional engineer fee may apply.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The decision as to what studio type – home or commercial – is right for you comes down to your budget and preferences, as well as what is available in your area. It's best to be practical about things. If you just need some rough demos to help you remember your songs, then recording in your bedroom on consumer-level equipment may be all the "studio experience" you need. But even the most humble of demos intended to reach listeners creates the need to find either a nice home studio, or a full-blown commercial facility.

Given the astounding quality and feasibility of modern recording gear, it never hurts to look for an in-home studio that meets all of your needs and bridges the gap between home and commercial studios. With some careful planning research, there's a studio option for every project, and every budget.

## DOES THE STUDIO FIT YOUR MUSIC STYLE

# CHOOSING THE RIGHT STUDIO FOR YOU

Whether you are a solo artist or a band, heading into the studio is a big step. You go into a recording studio to capture your ideas in the best possible way. It doesn't matter whether you are a songwriter seeking to bring your song to life from the written page, or you are a band looking to track all instruments, you need to be certain that the studio you are planning to use will really work for your project. There are a lot of studios out there and finding the right one can be challenging. Fortunately, you can follow a few best practices to help you make sure you're choosing the right studio for you.

Let's have a look at a few things to consider when choosing a studio.

## IS IT THE RIGHT SIZE FOR YOUR PROJECT?

Need to track drums and large amps? You'll want to find a studio with large, acoustically treated rooms that will allow you to record a drum set or amplifiers. If you are in a band that likes to

perform together in a room, you'll have to find a room large enough to allow for some degree of sound separation of the individual instruments.  Conversely, solo singers need only find a studio with a good isolation booth.

## CAN THE STUDIO TRACK ALL OF YOUR INSTRUMENTS?

Most modern projects and professional studios can handle a wide range of projects.  You will find that most have at least 16 input channels, with larger studios going up to as many as 128 simultaneous tracks. For most of us, that's overkill. Most singer-songwriters will need only a couple of inputs for themselves and a single instrument, but if you have a band, you'll quickly start to use up tracks.

Many bands record through the process of *overdubbing*, where each instrument is layered onto the recording one at a time. This can be accomplished with a few inputs. But if you prefer to play live, you'll eat through inputs fast. These factors must be considered before showing up at a given studio expecting to record. The studio needs to meet your technical requirements.

## DOES THE STUDIO HAVE AN EXPERIENCED ENGINEER ONSITE?

A studio full of gear is great, but you need someone who knows the ins-and-outs of all that equipment to be able to get a great recording out of the session. A good engineer will know how to use every piece of gear – from microphones to mixing boards – in the studio.  A seasoned engineer is able to use the gear at his/her disposal to help you realize what you have in mind for your music.

## DO THE STUDIO'S RATES FIT YOUR BUDGET?

As with anything else, when it comes to recording studios, you get what you pay for. Whatever the scope of your project, you are undoubtedly aware of the budget you have in mind. As a general rule of thumb, you should go for the best studio you can afford. That being said, there are a few other monetary considerations when choosing a studio.

Hourly studios are very common, and paying by the hour is perfectly acceptable in a digital studio. In an analog studio, you'll eat through time waiting for tapes to rewind, so although it's really fashionable to go analog, it can be very costly. In a digital studio, you should still be certain you have an accurate estimation of the time it will take to record your song before agreeing to the hourly rate. If, for example, you are an experienced singer-songwriter, you can probably nail down a winning take of a song in under an hour. Bands doing overdubs will take considerably more time. You'll also want to allow additional hourly time for post-production, editing, and mixing.  Discuss these factors up front with the studio manager to be sure you're going into the studio that is right for your budget.

## DOES THE STUDIO HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR STYLE OF MUSIC?

Most digital studios are technically capable of recording all kinds of music, but the engineer and the stable of gear should be relevant to your specific type of music. An engineer who has recorded techno may be great at it, but that same engineer might not know exactly what to do with a country band. This is understandable but it presents the challenge of finding a studio that is both the right physical place, and the right stylistic choice. Established studios may have experience with all types of music, but it's still something you should discuss before recording begins.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many things to think of when choosing a studio. Place and price must come together to make it the right choice for your next recording project. Still, the final determiner has to be the *vibe* of the place. If you feel comfortable and inspired, your recordings will benefit. So the best advice is to visit any studio before deciding to record there. With a little shopping around, there's definitely a studio that's perfect for your next project.

# AN OVERVIEW OF RECORDING A SONG

Recording a song can mean many things. It can mean recording a single-take performance onto a handheld recorder for personal archival purposes. It can mean recording a collection of songs in a multimillion-dollar studio. But for most of us, it means hitting a local project studio to track a cohesive performance of a song we have written either alone or with a band. The process may seem vague and veiled in mystery to begin with, but there are some basic steps that always come into play.

Let's take a quick look at the broad process of recording a song.

## PRE-PRODUCTION

We're going to assume that you've already *written* the song and you're preparing to show up at a studio for the first day of recording. The first phase of the recording process is called preproduction and it basically starts with a discussion between you and the studio's engineer. You want to talk with the engineer to find out if all of the equipment is in place to allow you to realize your vision for the song. For example, if you are a band that has an acoustic piano player, you'll need not only a room to put the piano in, but also specialized piano microphones to accurately capture the sound. All sorts of technical concerns can be addressed. You may have a drummer with a large kit that needs a certain amount of space, as another example. All of this can be cleared up in pre-production.

Another thing that happens in pre-production is that you outline the scope of the project with the engineer. For example, if you are a singer/guitarist and you want to record your song with studio musicians, you need to talk about that in pre-production consultation. Adding instrumentalists to fill out an arrangement will add to production costs, so you'll want to be totally prepared. Most of this decision depends on what you'd like the outcome of the sessions to be. If you're looking for personal reference material, then minimalism is probably merited. If on the other hand you want to be able to sell your music or shop it to labels, then a more robust, detailed production is called for.

## PREPPING THE SONG

You'll want to do a few dry runs of the song with the engineer in the control room to hammer out the recording details. The engineer may have suggestions for improving the performance to get

a better recording. If you've written out a rough idea, you should work it into distinct, identifiable song sections prior to when the recording starts. More songs than you think have been arranged in-studio.

Here are a few general considerations:

- Most songs start with a musical intro that builds into a verse. This is usually 4- to 8measures long depending upon preference.
- Verses are generally quieter than choruses. If you start at peak volume, it's hard to take the listener elsewhere in the song. Songs need to have an *ebb and flow*.
- Songs written around a single instrument can be filled out with additional instruments, creating a more dynamic palate of sound for the listener.
- Rests – you know breaks between notes – are very important to music. No one instrument should ever really go from start to finish within a song without rests.
- In most "pop" music, things happen in even numbers. Sections of 4, 8, and 16 measures are customary, and even casual listeners will subconsciously pick up on this.

A recording engineer can usually help you identify issues with your arrangement that can be fixed to help you create a great production.

## RECORDING THE SONG

Song recording can start in a couple of ways. Some things to consider are:

- Are you comfortable playing with a click track?
- Do you have a band that needs to play together all at once?
- Are you experienced with doing overdubs in isolated settings, away from band members?

The main point in using a "click track" is so that everyone involved can lock into a consistent time signature. Even musicians with the best natural timing make subtle variations in tempo while playing, so adding a click track can help everyone stay at the precise tempo throughout the song. Of course, some bands operate in odd time signatures or switch between them, creating the need to play 100% naturally, live. This is another recording consideration that you should have an idea about before the recording begins.

Once you've decided on a click track (or not), you can start layering tracks into the recording. Most bands start with a "scratch track" whereby the guitarist and drummer record a performance of the song together. The guitar is usually replaced with a re-recorded part, and all of the other layers are added around the drums. In pop/country/rock music the layers are typically as follows:

- Scratch guitar track and drums
- Bass guitar
- Rhythm/acoustic guitar

- Lead/steel/other guitar
- Strings/pianos/other instruments
- Vocals

If you are recording a band live in a room, overdubs can still be used to add to the sound field. Bands with a single guitarist will almost always ask him to double his parts to “thicken” the sound. You can get creative with tracking, but this the basic approach is to start with the drums and work up to the vocals.

Another approach is to start with a singer/guitarist who performs the song by his/herself and then add overdubs, starting with drums and moving up again, to fill out the song.

Variations do occur, and there’s no one way to go about tracking, so again, it comes down to pre-production planning to figure what will work best for your session.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

This is the skeletal process of recording. We’ll talk elsewhere about the nuts and bolts of choosing and placing microphones, and creating mixes from your recording, but you should now have a rough idea of what phases take place inside a recording studio. As you can tell, it’s much more than simply showing up with your instruments. Careful pre-production planning, lastminute tweaking, and layers of overdubs typically come together to create a great finished song – and your songs will benefit if you plan ahead.

## MOCK-UP THE SONG FIRST

# CREATE A ROUGH MIX OF SONG FIRST

As the name implies, a “rough mix” is a developmental – or “unofficial” – mix of a song that is lacking the refinements of the final mix. The rough mix is a mock-up - a prototype of what the song will eventually sound like.

The rough mix is often built progressively, as instruments and voices are added to the recording. Along the way, the song tends to take shape, often without really trying, thus creating a rough mix. As layers are added, the rough mix serves as a placeholder mix of the song.

## WHAT MAKES A FINAL MIX DIFFERENT?

The best way to understand the difference between the rough mix and the final mix is to establish what goes into the final mix. Mixing is the art of creating space in a recording by adjusting the volume of all instruments in the mix, panning them across the stereo spectrum, and adding mix effects to enhance the sound.

The final mix is, at times, a very surgical process of examining meters and spectrums, filtering out overbearing frequencies as needed.

In the digital world, software plug-ins are used to make such refines and always introduce latency – a very slight delay in the playback of a sound. Since processor-hungry plug-ins like non-linear reverb, multiband limiters, and aural exciters introduce several milliseconds of latency, these types of devices are often only put in the signal chain during the final mixing stage. The rough mix will usually omit such plug-ins, and instead will focus on “creative” studio effects like chorus, delay, and linear reverberation on individual tracks (these are called *insert* effects).

## WHEN TO MAKE THE FINAL MIX…

The final mix is detailed work that has a great effect on the outcome of the recording effort. For this reason, the mix is often conducted in a different room (or even a different studio) than where the session was tracked. Many times, a dedicated mix engineer will be utilized to give the final mix a “fresh” perspective.

The point of altering the final mix from the rough mix is to make sure that the recording sounds consistent across as many consumer and professional sound playback devices as possible. So, it stands to reason that the final mix would be completed objectively, in an effort to hammer out any artifacts or inconsistencies stemming from the tracking session.

## DOES IT MATTER IN HOME RECORDING?

Even artists who track at home on their personal computers can benefit from a professional final mix. Home Engineers can bounce the individual tracks from their DAW – called stems – to a disc and take them into a project or professional studio to allow a seasoned engineer to make objective final mix decisions.

Regardless of whether you track at home or in a studio, every recording will progress through the mixing stages, beginning with a rough mix and ending with a final mix. The rough mix is a tool that goes hand in hand with tracking and can be used to illustrate what the end result of a session will be. But the final mix is what will give your song that “radio-ready” sheen.

## SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

**Rough mix:**

- Built as the song is recorded.
- Focus is on creating a working model of the song.
- Not concerned with final effects, like multiband limiting or non-linear reverb
- Designed as reference to be used while recording is still in progress.
- Often used as a demo before final mixing has been completed

**Final mix:**

- Typically done once the song has been fully recorded.
- Often completed in a different studio than tracking
- Faders adjusted so that vocals reside in the “sweet spot” atop the song.
- Excessive lows and piercing highs are often filtered, or *EQ*’d, out
- All sound sources are panned to sound cohesive in the stereo field – most often, in such a way as to create a “room” or “space” for the listener.
- Studio effects like non-linear reverb, multiband limiting, and side-chain compression, among others, are added

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The rough mix is par for the course in recording. We can consider the rough mix to be a prototype of what the final song will sound like. Still, the final mixing session is totally critical to the ultimate success of the recording. It is only in the final stages of mixing that the final gloss is applied to the recording and it’s ready to be mastered. Nevertheless, it takes a good, working rough mix to get there!

## THE MOST ESSENTIAL PIECE OF EQUIPMENT

# HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT MICROPHONE

Microphones are one of the most essential, and most mysterious, pieces of gear found in the arsenal of the average recording studio. What you probably already know is that there are two main types, condenser and dynamic, and that there are a couple of other popular microphone types, notably ribbon and PZM.

There are also a few different microphone capsule/diaphragm types to consider – unidirectional, Omni-directional, large, small, and so on. Understanding what type of microphone to use for a given application can be confusing at first, but knowing a little about each one is the best way to make the right microphone choice during your next recording session.

Let's have a quick look at the most popular microphone types and their functions.


## DYNAMIC MICROPHONES

Dynamics are probably the microphone type that you are most familiar with. Dynamic microphones – like the Shure SM57 and SM58 – are commonly seen being used by bands of all calibers, from weekend warriors to mainstream superstars. The reason for the popularity of dynamics such as these comes down to low cost, reliability, decent sound, minimal feedback, and passive conductivity (meaning that they do not require phantom power in most cases).

Dynamic mics can be found in unidirectional and Omnidirectional capsule designs. This means that the unidirectional mic will pick up sound coming only from in front of its diaphragm (usually the performer or other sound source in extremely close proximity). Omni-directional mics will pick up sound all around – such as the natural ambience of a room, or an audience's applause in a live setting. It is easy to see that both designs can be useful in recording. The important takeaway in terms of recording dynamic mics is that they are generally not as sensitive as other types of mics, but this is an *advantage* in certain situations.

Here are the common applications for dynamic microphones in-studio:

- Close-micing of drums and other percussion sources.
- Close-micing of guitar and bass amplifiers.
- The Shure SM7B is a dynamic mic often used for "rock" vocals in-studio.
- The Shure SM57 is quite versatile and has been successfully used for everything from acoustic guitars, pianos, and wind instruments, to lead vocals.


## CONDENSER MICROPHONES

Condenser mics are another type of extremely versatile microphone. These are the large, often silver mics seen in big name studios. Condenser mics are less common in live applications because they are quite sensitive and susceptible to wind and handling noise. In the studio, condensers are usually fitted with a shock mount and windscreen to reduce those issues.

Condensers routinely make their way into almost any type of recording session. They will typically offer greater clarity (through expanded *frequency response*) than dynamic mics. Condenser mics often have selectable pickup patterns, selectable polarity, switchable volume “pads” (raising or lowering the overall output to facilitate either a particularly loud or quiet source), and even frequency roll-off (to eliminate obtuse low notes or piercing high frequencies). Condensers usually require phantom power, which are normally 48-volts that are back-fed up the mic cable to provide the electricity needed for the comparatively complex circuitry inside a condenser. Condensers are often used in conjunction with dynamic mics to record guitar cabinets and drum sets.

Here are some common uses for condenser microphones:

- Overhead micing of a drum kit or other percussion, typically supplemented by close micing of individual drums.
- Distance micing of guitar cabinets to pick up natural reverberations, usually alongside a close-up dynamic on the speaker.
- Lead and background vocals.
- Stings, pianos, brass, and woodwind micing.
- Acoustic guitar, usually in conjunction with a piezo pickup inside the guitar.

You may have heard the terms “small” and “large” diaphragm in reference to condenser mics. In short, small diaphragm mics are used for higher-pitched sounds like cymbals because their small diaphragm will vibrate more readily when hit with the higher harmonics of the cymbals, thus filling more of the mic’s frequency range with the useful sound of the instrument. Likewise, large diaphragm mics will vibrate more heartily when presented with deeper frequencies that can take advantage of the large surface area of the diaphragm. More vibration equates to more signal, plain and simple.

## RIBBON AND PZM MICROPHONES

Ribbon mics are wonderful sounding, albeit temperamental. Ribbons are technically a type of dynamic mic, but one with a much more sensitive (and fragile) diaphragm. The ribbon microphone is most often chosen by those who have an appreciation for the unique, subtle details in its sound. They are typically more costly than other microphone types, and are prone to breaking due to the use of a frail ribbon in place of the voice coil found in other dynamic mics.

PZM or *boundary* mics are another fairly specific type of microphone. PZM mics work by capturing sound pressure, more or less. Usually, this is for capturing the "thud" of a bass drum, while a dynamic is used to capture the sound of the actual strike of the drum. PZM mics are technically condenser mics with a diaphragm that is extremely close to a boundary, such as a wall or the inside of a bass drum.

## WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you are a singer-songwriter recording at home, one good dynamic and one good condenser mic will probably get the job done for you. If you need to record drums, for example, you will obviously need more mics.

If, however, you are searching for a studio, any good project or professional studio should have a stable of various different mics – particularly dynamics and condensers – to choose from. When looking for a recording studio, you will definitely want to be certain that the studio's mic lineup on-hand meets with the needs of your project.

# AFTER THE RECORDING

# MIXING, MASTERING, AND PACKAGING YOUR MUSIC

Once you've completed the initial tracking of your musical project in the studio, the process is not quite over. The next few steps in the recording process –mixing, mastering, and packaging –

will have a dramatic effect on the listening experience and presentation of your music. Whether it's a demo or a full-scale album, you have to invest in the processes of mixing, mastering, and packaging, just as you invest in tracking sessions. These processes seal the deal for your songs, and are essential to presenting your music in the best possible way, for maximum results.

## MIXING

The final mix is critical to the presentation of your music. As we've previously discussed, a *rough mix* typically evolves during the course of tracking the various instruments in the recording process. But every project deserves a professional final mix. A good final mix involves more than adjusting levels of instruments; it incorporates additive effects and signal processors, as well as spreading all sounds across the stereo spectrum.

Detailed mixing is something that a professional engineer is experienced with achieving. For such an expert, a mix is a *sound field* in which each instrument has its own space. But mixing is much more than moving faders and turning pan knobs. Every sound in the mix affects every other, and one sound should not overrun another. The final mix can make or break a recording.

The final mix is also the time when some key effects are applied to the overall track. Reverb, compression, multiband limiting, and equalization are customarily applied to the final mix, and when used carefully, these effects can contribute to your songs having that radio-ready, professional sound. It just takes the assistance of a professional mix engineer to achieve the right balance of effects levels for a thoroughly polished mix.

## MASTERING

Mastering is one of the most mysterious and important aspects of producing a recording. Mastering is always best left to a dedicated mastering engineer. While there are many effects and plug-ins on the market that claim to provide easy mastering for your songs, the truth is those tools are only as good as the engineer who is using them. So it's important to have your songs professionally mastered. It's sometimes been said that mastering is "making it really loud," but that's not totally true. Mastering is the art (and science) of making a song acceptably loud so that it plays back at a level listeners are accustomed to, while not suffering from any

overbearing frequencies or volume drops. Mastering is truly essential to making your music translate across as many sound playback devices as possible, from car stereos, to iPods, to club P.A. systems.

## PACKAGING

The presentation of music is changing all the time. A few years ago, packaging simply meant getting CDs and cover printed and sealed into a case. But now, in the digital space, packaging can encompass the creation of mp3s and lossless (compression that reduces a file's size with no loss of quality) audio files and digitally packaging them with images of album art and other online content. The sky is the limit when it comes to what packaging can be, but the important factor for most up-and-coming artists is to make sure that your packaging contains contact information (phone, website, email, social media) because you never know who's hands your music might fall into.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Mixing, mastering, and packaging may not be the immediate things on your mind when you decide to do some recording, but you can't afford to overlook those crucial final steps. Mixing creates a beautiful balance of instruments, mastering makes sure playback is optimized, and packaging turns your music into a physical presentation.  Even though we tend to all focus on the actual recording phase very intensely, you can't afford to ignore the essential final stages that will help you reach more people with your music.

# GETTING YOUR MUSIC NOTICED

# HOW TO MARKET YOUR MUSIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The digital world in which we live presents some interesting possibilities – and a few challenges. In the old days of the demo tape or CD, things were considerably different. Back then, the idea was simply to mail the music to whomever you needed to hear it, and it was either listened to or not. Now, thanks to mp3s and the internet, our music is accessible round the clock to fans and anyone else who might be listening.

There is still definitely a need to have CDs to send out, but marketing your music hinges on how well you make use of the internet. The process of getting the word out about your music now involves social media and other online platforms. Fortunately, these resources can potentially save you on postage and help you gauge reactions right away.

One main thing to bear in mind is that marketing your music means addressing different audiences with slightly different purposes in mind. Promoting music to fans, concert venues, radio stations, and record industry personnel are all driven by different objectives.

Let's take a closer look at the differences, and how to best reach each potential audience.

## REACHING FANS

Reaching potential fans is essential to any musical endeavor. Getting them to hear your music is also relatively simple. Once you're all done in the recording studio, and your music has been professionally mixed and mastered, you should create some mp3s of your music. You can probably ask the mastering engineer to create these mp3 files for a nominal fee, or you can rip your CDs yourself. This will allow you to upload your music to online resources, like SoundCloud (for free demos), or commercial outlets like iTunes, eventually. See the Resource Section for information on digital marketing.

Most importantly, you'll want to engage your fans and share your music through Facebook by creating a dedicated page for you or your band. You'll begin collecting fans and "Likes" by sharing content – photos, sound clips, and info through social media. Eventually, you'll be able to use social media to drive sales of your music and promote your shows. Using social media to promote *anything* is a study unto itself, but the important takeaway is that you get started with it. You'll go on to use social media platforms to promote your band in other ways, too.

## GETTING GIGS

If you're an up-and-coming artist or band, you will undoubtedly want to play a few gigs to help promote your music. One of the key factors that venues will use to decide whether to book your band or not is your fan base. One immediate way to substantiate that you have fans is to make sure you share your social media links with prospective venues. Venues are primarily concerned with what kind of crowd you are able to draw. Showing them a fan base through social media, coupled with having solid demos of your songs, will help you get gigs that grow you or your band as a *brand*. Just because you only have 20 fans to start with, or 2000, isn't that important. Small clubs are often only looking to draw an additional ten or fifteen people, so they're a perfectly reasonable place to start.

## RADIO AIRPLAY

Getting on the radio is actually easier than you might think. Many local stations have a "local's only" program that will accept demos, and that can lead to radio time for your songs. Often, the

website of the station will feature an open invitation to send demos and the station's mailing address. In other cases, a disc jockey will state the address to send materials to on-air. So you should start seeking radio play by doing your homework, finding a program that your music will fit in with, and send in your materials. This can lead to increased fans, more gigs, and even gain the attention of record industry insiders.

## RECORD INDUSTRY PERSONNEL

The people who matter in the record industry may include A & R reps, producers, and other insiders. Reaching these types of people can be hard. Entire volumes have been writer on the topic, but the short version is:

- Write or email the industry insider before sending anything, asking permission to submit your materials.
- Make sure you send a fully professional package complete with press kit and contact details.
- Send links to social media and online pages relating to your project.
- Don't send unsolicited material – it will most often simply be rejected.
- Be gracious and thankful – *even if rejected*.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The process of marketing your music is filled with choices. Regardless of who your audience is, the basics are always the same. You want to make sure you have a nice package with which to present your music, engage in social media activities, and have a press kit. These tools, together with your talent and determination, will put your music in the hands of your intended audience. These underlying principles carryover into larger-scale marketing efforts down the road, so learning the methods we've covered will continue to help you throughout your musical career.

# MY BEST RECORDING TIPS

# TOP 10 RECORDING TIPS

The first time you make a recording can be a confusing and daunting process. But, it's something that has been done many, many times before. So with history as our guide, I've compiled a list of the top 10 recording to tips to help you have a smooth recording session that yields a great final product.

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Unless you are a professional artist with a multi-million-dollar budget, you won't have the luxury of being able to do much songwriting in the studio. So it's important to have the song perfectly memorized before arriving to record. If you are a singer/songwriter, this just means that you need to be prepared to perform the song as you would in a live setting. If you have a band, all members of the band need to know the song backward and forward prior to going in the studio. Practice, as they say, makes perfect.

## BRING SPARES

It may sound obvious, but you need to bring extra strings, picks, cables, and even backup instruments when you go to a studio to record. What can happen, *will* happen when you're watching the clock. Guitar strings will break, picks will disappear into thin air, and cables will fail. Never count on a studio to have everything you need, although many do have some spare gear laying around. Try to be prepared with everything that you need to complete the session.

## THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS "FIX IT IN THE MIX"

Despite popular belief, you can't just cover up blatant mistakes with software or "tricks." The old saying is: garbage in, garbage out. Even in the digital recording age, the same is true. If you sing out of tune, it can be "tuned" with Autotune, but even casual listeners can hear the difference. Always strive for performance excellence. The wealth of plug-ins and studio "tricks" offered in most studios can work wonders, but you have to start with stellar source material.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

With all the options available in DAWs these days, it's easy to get caught in the trap of going too far. You can easily get carried away with adding layers of guitars, multi-part vocals, and creating elaborate routing schemes for side-chain compression and reverb. The best advice is to hone in on those elements which are essential to the song, and to not be tempted into squandering time with unneeded symphonies of guitars and the like. Keep in mind, each track you add introduces frequencies that can compete with other instruments in your mix – which can make your recording suffer if those sounds are cancelling each other out.

## BACK IT UP

Many great songs have been lost to failed hard drives, power surges, and other electrical mishaps. Don't let this happen to your recordings. Regular backups are the best way to prevent the loss of valuable takes. Save your session files to external drives or other media as often as is practical and remember to save updated versions every day.

## STAY OUT OF THE RED!

While analog clipping yields desirable "tape saturation," digital clipping just creates distorted "blips" that don't sound good at all. Watch the meters as you are tracking sources, any time the signal passes "0dB," you're clipping the input. A limiting compressor can be into the signal chain before the input to tame those excessively dynamic sources (like vocals and bass guitar) so that digital clipping does not occur.

## LESS IS MORE…

If you're a guitarist or bassist, you may use a huge, 100-watt stack to perform live. In the studio though, it may be preferable to use a smaller, 1 x 12" (or even smaller) speaker cabinet. Big cabs have more wood and screws in their construction, which have a tendency to rattle. You might not notice the unwanted noise in a live setting with other sound sources going on, but in the sterile environment of the recording studio, the mic captures everything. Many tube amps get their "sound" from being cranked – you can use a "power brake" or governor to crank the amp for tonality, while sparing studio speakers by tracking at lower volume levels.

## TUNE AND RETURN

Virtually all live instruments require tuning. Drums, guitars, and acoustic pianos can go out of tune over the course of a recording session. It's advisable to retune between takes so that every take is perfectly in tune. Slight variations in tuning can occur after each performance, so always check tuning before hitting "record."

## DON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY WHAT YOU HEAR

When musicians first start to record themselves performing, many are struck by something surprising: *they make lots of mistakes – lots and lots of mistakes*. Listening back to the inconsistencies in your timing, weak projection, or blatant bum notes that might occur actually

helps you overcome those issues to become a better performer. Don't think you've got no hope – *everyone* starts out making tons of mistakes.

## ELIMINATE STRESSFUL DISTRACTIONS

It's very tempting to invite friends (read *girlfriends*) to the studio to show off what you're doing, but this is typically ill-advised. Distractions tend to introduce tension and stress. Your recording sessions should be all about getting the song *right*, not about socializing in a studio. In most cases, you are paying for studio time, so it's best to keep it professional and eliminate stress inducing factors. Added stress will compromise your performances and can affect those around you. Keeping it stress free may just be the best advice of all!

# FINAL WORDS

Congratulations! If you've made it to his point, you're very serious about your music. I know I've provided you with a lot to think about in this eBook, but you now have the knowledge to take the information that you know, use it and make great music. Here are a few final thoughts I'd like to share with you before I finish up.

**How Much You Succeed is All Up to You**
The music business is based on relationships. To be successful as a songwriter, artist or musician you need to network and develop some strong relationships with people in the business. You never know when the opportunity will present itself for you to pitch your song.

**Protect Your Music**
Technically your song is copyrighted the minute your pen leaves the paper. You do not need to copyright your song right away. It is advisable to copyright a song that gets a lot of exposure. Copyrighting songs is an expensive practice if you are a prolific writer.

It is advisable to copyright multiple songs and only pay one fee for the entire collection. The collection of songs, however, must have the same writers on each composition. If one of your songs receives a lot of attention you may consider following up the copyright with an individual registration for that song.

**Record a High-Quality Demo Before You Pitch It**
I can't over emphasize this advice. Sometimes the song itself dictates whether or not you need to fully demo it. Some songs are just fine as a guitar vocal or piano vocal. Many people prefer them that way. Some people just don't get it unless it sounds like a full-blown record. The important thing about the demo, whether it's a fully produced band demo or a guitar vocal is to make sure:

1. The vocalist sings in tune

2. The instruments are in tune

3. You can hear the lyrics over the music

4. The recording is of the highest quality

**Don’t Be Afraid to Ask for Help!**
There is absolutely no reason why you shouldn’t ask for help when you need it. Many people, including myself, are happy to help people out with their music. You’d be surprised.

**Don’t Give Up on Your Dream of Creating Great Music!**
You probably have the capability to create amazing music and affect people in ways that you thought were never possible. Take advantage of it.

# RESOURCES FOR SONGWRITERS AND ARTIST

## Expose Your Music

Mycountryspace.com

Reverbnation.com

Soundcloud.com

Americansongspace.com

Songramp.com

Songwriternation.com

## Your Music

Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI)

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)

## Tools for Songwriters

Mywerx.com

Artistdata.com

Songsinc.com

Sonicbids.com

## Organizations

Nashvillesongwriters.com

JPFolks.com

Songwritersconnection.com

Songu.com

Musesmuse.com

## Social Media

Facebook.com

## Protect

Artistdata.com

Headliner.fm

Nimbit.com

Hootsuite.com

Myspace.com

Twitter.com

Pinterest.com