

THROUGH THE CEDARS MUSIC PRODUCTIONS

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A mini-guide to studio recording

So you're going to "take the plunge" and do some recording. Great! There is no more rewarding experience for a musician than to see their music come alive and finally hear the finished product. It's an exciting and challenging process, but there are a few things you should know and a few things you can do that will make the process efficient, fun and ultimately lead to the best possible product.

1) PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!! Time in a studio costs money. Do not waste it rehearsing, composing, arguing, figuring stuff out and second guessing yourself (unless you *really* don't mind paying us to do it).

2) BE PREPARED. Not just rehearsed, but make sure you have your music/charts, instruments, spare strings, parts, cables, tuners, etc. There is nothing more frustrating than getting everyone together and then breaking a string or forgetting the AC adapter for the keyboard or the stool for the drum kit (it's happened!).

3) UNDERSTAND HOW THE RECORDING WILL HAPPEN.

Basically there are two ways to record music.

a) "track on track" This is how most studio recordings are done with each instrument/voice recorded separately (one after another) and the whole shebang put together at the end. This method gives the engineer the most flexibility to edit, fix mistakes and sweeten the sound as there should only be one instrument or voice on each track. There are a few things to bear in mind that can really make the process great...

1) learn to play to a "click track" or metronome. Typically the composer/singer will record a "scratch track" that all the other musicians will use as a starting point for the song. It may be a guitar, guitar & voice, piano, piano & voice, etc. The scratch track will only be used for the other players. It won't be on the finished song, so a bad note here and there is not the end of the world. Your tempo however, is very important! Speeding up or slowing down may not be a problem for a soloist, but it is a nightmare for anyone trying to lay down tracks over it.

2) Try and lay down your tracks in the proper order. Usually after the scratch track is down the drums & bass are added next. Why? Because they will carry the tempo for everything else. If you have good, solid drum & bass tracks everything should fall into place. Typically vocals are the last tracks to be recorded.

3) If you can, try to practice playing/singing with a set of headphones on. This is how it happens in the studio. It can be a bit weird at first, so if you have experienced it you won't find it so odd. If you are used to playing & singing at the same time try to master doing both separately (some folks can't seem to sing if they're not strumming a guitar!) It's all about getting those nice clean tracks that the engineer can mix together for you.

4) Know when it makes more sense to redo the track than to try to fix the mistakes in post-recording editing. We can do some pretty amazing things these days with digital media, but there's no substitute for having done it right in the first place. For example, if it takes 3 minutes to re-sing the vocals and the edit might take 30 minutes or more to fix those mistakes, which makes more sense? When in doubt, ask the engineer.

b) "live off the floor" This is when the entire band gets together and we record them playing together at the same time. It's still a multitrack recording, but there will always be "bleed" (more than one instrument/voice appearing on the track) so the ability to edit is limited. On the plus side, it is a very fast way to record and you can often get that great "live" energy that is sometimes missing in studio recordings. Everyone has to be at their best though. Any mistakes will be evident. When it works it can be amazing! Take Bruce Springsteen's "We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions". Live off the floor in his living room with principal recording done in just 2 days!

4) FEEL FREE TO ASK QUESTIONS. No one starts out knowing everything about anything. If there is something you don't understand, or you're curious about, ask. If you can't hear yourself in the headphones or the bass is too loud, or whatever, tell us. We're working for you.

4) THERE IS A LOT MORE TO MAKING A SONG THAN JUST RECORDING IT!

At the *very least* you should budget for 3-4 hours of post-recording editing, mixing and mastering for every hour of recording and that is if *everything* has gone flawlessly!

5) HAVE A PRODUCER FOR THE SONG / ALBUM. The producer is the person who decides when to redo the vocal, remix the song, and tells the artist(s) that they have done enough and should stop (happens a lot!) The producer is the "buck stops here" person for the project. They make the final call on artistic decisions. It should not be the engineer, although they may offer advice if asked.

6) SERIOUSLY CONSIDER HAVING THE PRODUCER BE SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOU OR YOUR BAND. Stop screaming...there's a good reason for it. Most artists will admit that they have no objectivity when it comes to their own material. They don't know which of the 29 vocal takes is the best one. They can't say "stop...you've got it!" It's not easy to find a producer, because it obviously requires a great deal of trust and understanding, but even the big, big stars usually get someone to produce or co-produce.

Recording can be a daunting process, but it doesn't have to be. Like anything else in life the better prepared you are the better things will go and in a studio that's when it's really fun for all concerned.

MAKING MUSIC IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN. IF IT ISN'T, WHY DO IT?