

## What To Expect from a Producer by Alex Reed

This article is meant to explain and clarify what you can expect, both creatively and financially, from hiring a producer to assist you in your goal.

One of the ways a producer can be most useful to you is by providing an objective ear. In the studio, it can be difficult to gain perspective as you create. A typical example is vocal performance. Your producer can recognize if you need to try it again and guide you through phrasing, pitch, emotion, etc. A good producer will also know to stop you when you've nailed it.

But don't think of a producer as some uninvolved bystander. They can be your partner in the studio, arriving at the ideal guitar sound, finding the right tempo, choosing the sweetest harmonies. Involve them early in the process by inviting them down to rehearsal. This gives you a chance to see if this is the right producer for you. It also allows you to avoid certain problems later on. For example, the band might be convinced which three songs out of ten should be recorded for a demo. At rehearsal a producer can bring a fresh perspective on which songs will work best.

The organizational skills of the producer should also be considered, as even a simple demo can present all sorts of logistical nightmares to the inexperienced artist. Someone needs to find the right studio and engineer, assemble musicians, and negotiate the rates for each. Whether you've secured a \$20,000 loan from a wealthy fan or scraped up \$1500 on your own, every penny counts. Someone needs to keep one eye on the budget while keeping the other eye on the musical "big picture."

You may have the talent and willingness to do all this yourself. One question to ask yourself is, "Do I want to put all my energies into logistics to the possible detriment of my songs?" For some artists, the answer is "yes, I'll do it myself." And I say all the power to you. But while I can't speak for other producers, much of the pleasure I get out of a project is creating a situation where the artist can focus solely on the music.

So maybe you like the idea of getting assistance, but don't know if you can afford it. Budgets are obviously less complicated for a self-financed recording than for a major label record, but you'll still want to work out an agreement with your producer before you begin.

In any scenario involving payment after the project is finished, I strongly urge you to put it in writing. This can be more complicated than it seems. The trick is to arrive at a document that is neither overwhelming and unnecessary (25 pages of legalese) nor flimsy and worthless (two paragraphs that would be laughed out of court by any serious attorney). A well written 1-3 page "deal memo" is sufficient; typically it is the producer's responsibility to present a first draft. The agreement is more for their protection than yours.

The main idea I want to leave you with is to be clear from the start about what you expect from your producer and know what they want out of the project as well. Don't be afraid to ask pointed questions like, "How many days will the whole thing take?" and "Why do you want to work with me?" If the relationship begins with elements of honesty and trust, the recording will be that much more successful.

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