

## Trev's studio guide

### How to plan and what to expect in the recording studio

If you've never been in a recording studio before it's good to have some idea of what you'll find when you get there and how to make the best use of it. I can't speak for all studios but we often arrange for people to come and have a look and a friendly chat before the actual sessions begin.

As well as working with established artists we also see a lot of beginners and we always do our best for everyone.

Recording is only part of the process and although sometimes we do record as part of projects that may be worked on in several studios, we usually see the whole process through to the end. This then, includes editing, mixing, mastering and compiling CD tracks, artwork etc.

### Getting ready

As with most creative processes, preparation is very important. There's little point booking studio time if you're not 100% ready and by 'you' I mean all of the members of your outfit who will be performing. Recording studio time is usually more expensive than rehearsal studio time so it makes little sense to still be working out that solo or harmony as it's costing you more money. We don't mind but the clock will still be ticking away and racking up your hours. It's very easy to lose track of time and also to underestimate how long the process can take. Other things to consider are replacing strings, skins etc, tuning them correctly and breaking them in a little at home. You should re-tune often in the studio as well. When rehearsing, check that your sounds work properly together. Mis-matched sounds are often the cause of cluttered sounding mixes both live and in the studio.

Bring only what you need. If you don't need an 8 x 12 guitar stack to get your sound then don't bring it.

Consider the difference between what you do live and what you can do in the studio, there's often a vast difference which you can use to your advantage. Try and think of overall production and your final sound.

Do you want to play together or record parts separately? It doesn't necessarily save time playing together. We often record a guide track either before or during early takes then focus on one or two performers at a time.

Can you play to a click (metronome)? If so then note the tempo of each song and give them to the engineer at the start of the sessions. If not then it's still good to have a list of songs and what order you want to record them. This can be different to the final track order for your album and it makes sense to start with the easiest ones.

Have a think if there are any other things you'd like on your songs that you don't do live but may help, such as percussion and vocal harmonies. We can provide almost any sounds and also session musicians if needed.

### The time factor

We often get asked things like 'how much does it cost to record 5 songs?'

It's very difficult to say, even if you follow it up with information about your performers. There is a certain amount of setting up time and preparation for every track including getting the best sound for the performer and the recording (they can be different).

It's very rare for anyone to do a perfect take first time (even professionals) and it's wise to do several takes anyway.

When you listen back in a few days you'll find that drum fill wasn't quite as accurate as you thought. Yes we can fix things, put them in time, tune them and make them sound great, but that can take a long time whereas playing it again correctly is usually much quicker (and cheaper).

Once the recording is done there is invariably time needed to edit tracks, either to correct them or just tidy things up (e.g. Vocals often have strange 'mouth' noises that need removing).

Adding effects is not quite as simple as 'putting a bit of reverb on'. What type of reverb? Decay time? Pre-delay time?

Send level for each track or subgroup send? What about EQ? Compression? Gating? It all changes the sound. You don't need to worry about these things, just be aware that they need time to do.

Mixing is best done at a different time to the recording so that your ears get a chance to rest and recover. Also bear in mind that studio monitors are not like hi-fi speakers or headphones. They don't flatter the music but are designed to give a 'flat' honest sound which should work well across most other listening platforms.

Mixing is also best when there are not several musicians in the room saying 'turn me up! It's very easy to reach the point of distortion by turning things up as this can mask other sounds which then get turned up to compensate. Choose one person to sit in on the mix (or better still let the engineer do it) and then send the elected person at a later date when you've had good time to assess the mix and make some constructive notes. We aim to make your music as good as it can be but if you decide that you want the guitars too loud then the final decision is yours.

Allow plenty of time for mixing and don't see it as a single session process. It's often best to do several sessions, each time fine-tuning your mix.

The more time you spend getting things right the better your songs will sound.

### After the mix

Once you're happy with the mix your tracks will be exported as stereo mixdowns which will then need to be mastered.

Mastering is the process that optimizes your mixes and makes them suitable for various formats. The modern trend is to compress the music extremely hard so that it sounds louder (although it actually isn't) but this also destroys the dynamic range (difference between loud and softer parts) and detracts from the overall quality. The general tone of each track can be tweaked using Equalization and various other processes may be used to improve the overall clarity or change the feel. Tracks will also be edited so that there's no surplus lead-in or out time.

Once mastered the tracks can be saved in the correct formats and resolution for delivery. We record at much higher than CD quality so then tracks have to be rendered down. Final quality depends on your requirements.

If you have data and product codes they can be embedded in the files at the final stage. We can provide ISRC codes.

If you are producing a CD then track listings and information will be included during the authoring process.

### Copyright

Please note that you are responsible for your own copyright issues and we do not accept any responsibility for infringement of copyright. If in doubt then contact MCPS and PRS for advice on licensing.

### General information

We want everyone to enjoy working with us and to be happy with their recordings when they are finished. If you're not happy at any time then let us know. Many of our clients have been working with us for a long time and return regularly with new projects. Our approach is very flexible and our many years of professional experience means we can often advise and share our knowledge with people who need help and advice.

Our studio is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere to work in, usually with plenty of tea, coffee and biscuits on the go. It is however, not a good place to be if you're going to get bored easily, so unless you're recording or working on your music it's better to stay at home. Bored musicians usually distract the working ones making the process much longer.

The studio also has great video facilities so consider doing this as you record, fans like video!

If you have any questions or comments then please get in touch and we'll do our best to help.

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