

**D.I.Y. MUSIC PRODUCTION:
YOUR MUSIC, YOUR WAY - THE HISTORY AND PROCESS**

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a battle cry against corporate acquisition and power in the music business. For decades, a peasant culture of "do-it-yourselfers" has been nipping at the heels of the mainstream music industry. The DIY subculture of musicians has evolved over the years, but the fundamentals behind the message remain the same. These fundamentals, among others, are personal ownership of one's work and not an ethic of compromising one's artistic vision for the sake of manufactured mainstream success.

CHAPTER II

WHY DIY? A HISTORY

In the world of popular music, copyright laws are made for the seller, not the artist. Royalty rights began in 1710 with England's "Statute of Anne", which gave musicians and songwriters rights to their music (Gilby 2). Today, however, the producers of the recordings still have powerful control over the music. Now, in most standard popular music contracts, music released by a label is owned by the label, and decisions about things such as licensing and marketing are not up to the artist (Keyboard 88). In a standard major record label contract, royalties for artists are at about ten cents per record (McCready 1). That means that if ten thousand albums are sold, the artist is paid one thousand dollars. After paying back the advance made by the label for recording and other expenses, those funds would be negligible. The result is that under these conditions only widely appealing musicians can make record companies a substantial amount of money (Bracy 1). A generous amount of artist molding (euphemistically called "artist development") must occur. The result: the manufactured music heard on MTV and on top forty radio.

In the 1960s, an underground culture of psychedelic garage bands and experimental music composers emerged with home-recorded cassette tapes. These independent artists, musicians, and entrepreneurs created local, national and even international networks of support which fell outside of the

corporate mainstream but still posed a notable "threat" to that mainstream (Stoller 34). Anti-DIY slogans began to emerge from the music industry such as "Hometaping is Killing Music" in attempts to legitimize the control the industry had over selling and distributing music to the people (Boeler 40). While this early sub-culture movement did not have lasting results, it set the stage for other movements that achieved greater success.

In the late seventies came the punk movement. It was a rejection of arena rock and the heavy emphasis on production technique. The big stars of rock music had joined the show-biz world, rejecting the rebellious, anti-establishment attitudes they once had, and many found this overproduced music to be disposable and irrelevant (Des Pres and Landsman 58). Punk music put an emphasis on loud, often out of tune guitars, break-neck drumming speeds and gristly vocals. It was not uncommon for many punk bands to form before the members knew how to play their instruments. Because of this approach, many more people could become involved. While many well-known punk artists were given a push toward the spotlight by the music industry, the attitude of do-it-yourself remained in tact.

Also in the seventies, art-music by the likes of Philip Glass and Brian Eno emerged that melded a more politically and culturally minded viewpoint with the punk mentality of rejecting the stronghold of the industry.

In the eighties, new advances in cassette recording technology made higher quality duplications possible. Reverb, chorus, delays, compressors, equalizers

and other effects previously only available in professional studios were now accessible in a four-track home recording unit.

At this point, the Lost Music Network, a punk-fanzine-inspired publication, reviewed all cassettes and records sent to it. It contained contact information to hundreds of musicians and independent publishers all over the world. This was just one of the means to a wide network of independent artists that continues to pose a threat to corporate music (David 9).

Then the Internet created an explosive surge in the rise of independent and underground music to the masses. Sites such as mp3.com gave bands a medium for exposure and connections at the click of a mouse. Songs became available for download or streaming play (Gilby 58). Internet-hosted music became the post office for the cassette culture of the sixties. Tape trading turned into downloading/uploading, albums being bought and sold, and whole tours being booked from the comfort of home.

Today, with the availability and affordability of CD burners and quality printers, the quality of a DIY production can compete with a major label release on even ground.

CHAPTER III

THE PROCESS: DOING IT YOURSELF

The process of creating a DIY album can be a difficult but rewarding process. One can go the total do-it-yourself route or employ some help from higher-level companies that specialize in working with independent musicians. No matter how you do it, the DIY process is about circumventing the industry and still successfully sharing your music with the masses. As a bonus, it is more feasible now than ever. (Des Pres and Landsman 62)

When it comes to recording, a band or musician has several options. First, one can arrange to record at a professional studio. There is usually no shortage of these in most towns. This costs from around ten dollars to a hundred dollars an hour. This depends on the quality and type of recording equipment used, as well as the experience of the owners of the studio. Most recording studios that you find today in the phone book will have an all-digital format. This means that they will go from a digital mixer to a hard drive and the final product will be a compact disk (Partyka 76). Others still might use analog reel-to-reel recording equipment, but that has been on the decline over the last five or six years. Many enthusiasts still swear by the smooth, warm sounds of analog via the four-track cassette tape or reel-to-reel and claim that the quality of digital recording has not surpassed the two-inch reel. In fact, many major label albums you can hear today were recorded on two-inch and transferred to digital for release on compact disk

(Strad 518).

Also, there are dozens of high-quality home recording units that can be found in catalogs such as Musician's Friend or at online stores. Analog cassette tape recorders can range from one hundred to around six hundred dollars, while home digital recorders can go from three hundred dollars into the thousands. Other things to consider are effects processors, which can add many touches to one's recordings. Home recording studios often come with some effects. The key is to figure out the needs and expectations of the music that is being recorded.

Also key to a musical body of work is the visual elements that accompany it. The old adage of not judging a book by its cover is far from the way it works in regards to music. One can take several approaches to the visual part, specifically the sleeve artwork, of an album. First, one can hand-draw art and go from there. Also, one can digitally design and lay out the graphics and text and work from there. In addition, there are several means of hiring designers to do the layout of an album, but that can be expensive. At the most, one should enlist a friend with a knack for Photoshop to design the sleeve (Rubin 80).

When the artwork is completed, it can be printed in basically two ways. The first is sending it to a professional printer at the loss of up to a few dollars per sleeve. The second (and more fundamentally DIY) way is to either go to a local copy shop or use a home printer. Something to keep in mind is whether or not to use color. It is more expensive but can make for a much more professional look. However, black and white printed album art can be found that is just as sharp

and attractive as a color print. Do not feel limited by grayscales. If the artwork is sharp and set for black and white printing, it can look very nice. Even nicer will be the feeling of only paying around ten cents per sleeve.

The next thing to think about is the packaging materials of the entire album. This includes the sleeves and the casing. For sleeves, there are several choices of paper or cardstock. Keep in mind that if words and art are to be printed on both sides of the sheet, a thicker weight might be necessary. Also, cardstock or paper with a heavier weight usually looks and feels more professional and is only slightly more expensive. Also, for a different (and cheaper) look, one can print the album information on mailing labels, available at any office supply store.

For the CD cases, there are new items on the market every week. One can go the traditional casing route, the slimline case route (which only has the inner sleeve area), or one can use many of the alternative plastic cases that continue to change and evolve. Also, cardboard or thin plastic (think sandwich bags) sleeves are available through many online stores. These are the cheapest way to package music, and they can still be made to look attractive.

Next, one must think about the compact disks themselves. There are several companies that will press CDs, but they usually only work in units of thousands. For a new group or musician, there is usually no need to make so many at first. The best way to do it is to acquire the use of a home burner. They can be bought today for under two hundred dollars. Home-burning can be time consuming, but at just the cost of the burner and the CDRs (recordable compact

disks), the money saved is well worth it. Compact disks can be bought in three-packs, ten-packs or in spindles of twenty, fifty or one hundred. Brands such as Imation or Memorex cost just a little more, but have a better protective coating to help prevent scratching. If comparison shopping is used, quality CDRs can be found and purchased for about thirty-eight to fifty cents a piece.

CHAPTER IV

ACTION: AN EXAMPLE IN COMPLETION

The following is an example of a complete DIY compact disc project. The band is a hip-hop group from Lubbock, TX called Record Breakers. I put their album out through my fledgling independent record label, I Like Applejuice Records.

The members of Record Breakers were mostly still in high school, but they have a great sound and were, in my opinion, ready to put together an album to sell at shows and local music stores. They had a good fan base of friends and "scenesters" and I believed that their refreshing approach to hip-hop music (positive, often humorous lyrics) with live instrumentation would sell. The band and I set up a verbal contract where I agreed to put up half the costs of the production of the album and would in return receive twenty percent of sales. I would also do the layout of the sleeves. We decided on making a batch of fifty CDs to start and seeing where it went from there.

To record, I employed my friend Shaun Jones. Shaun is the proprietor of Studio in a Box, a mobile recording studio that he can move from place to place in his station wagon. He gave us a fantastic rate of ten dollars an hour, and we set up at my house. Recording took two days of about five hours a day, and it came out great, capturing the organic, live sound of the band.

For packaging, we decided on thinline cases, which I found in packs of forty

for fourteen dollars. Using slimline cases meant we only had to worry about the inner sleeve and not the back of the case. We decided to print the sleeves on single sheets of cardstock.

For the artwork, the band wanted to have a photo of their friend Raji on the cover. I still am not sure why, but I thought the whimsical notion was somehow fitting, so I set up a photo shoot for Raji and the band to get everything I needed for the sleeve. After laying out everything in Photoshop, I took the files to a local print shop to have them put onto cardstock. The cost of the fifty sleeves was around fourteen dollars.

Next, I bought a spindle of CDRs and a package of labels for the project. I went the high-quality route and bought Imation, a brand I have come to trust over the years. A spindle of one hundred CDRs cost just under forty dollars and a package of labels (in a pack of one hundred) cost twenty dollars. I now had all of the materials and could now focus on manufacturing the product.

The band and I agreed to sell the CDs for five dollars each. As far as local and independent music is usually concerned, over twice as many CDs will sell at five dollars than ten. So at twenty percent, my cut would be one dollar per CD.

The following is a table of costs and profits on sales.

(per cd.)	
sleeve -	.28
CDR -	.38
case -	.35
label -	.20
cost of making one CD -	\$1.21
cost of making 50 CDs -	\$60.50
recording costs -	\$100.00
total cost for 50 CDs, final -	\$160.50
total in sales for 50 CDs -	\$250.00
profit after sales	\$89.50

This might not seem like a lot, but take into account that if Record Breakers decide to make another batch of CDs, the costs will be lower since the recording costs were paid for in the first batch. Also, the goal of a DIY album is not huge profits. It is about exposure and sharing your work with the masses.

That brings us to where the Record Breakers album can be purchased. Thanks to some of our local music supportive record stores in Lubbock, the album can be found at three local establishments. It can also be picked up at the band's shows or from them in person. In addition, it will soon be available from the I Like Applejuice Records online store. Other options include

independent distributors, many of which can be found online. Sites such as interpunk.com make selling your music to the world easy, and not so much about big business (de Pres and Landsman 66). Because this was a DIY project, the band saved hundreds of dollars and still ended up with a quality product. As a footnote to this example, Record Breakers sold all fifty CDs in about two days and have ordered more.

On the following two pages, you will see the final artwork for the album, entitled Raji.



Raji.

Record Breakers

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, DIY is the best way to share music without compromising artistic integrity. Also, since the number of bands has increased exponentially without the comparable growth in major label signings, it allows one's music to simply be released at all. Due to the leaps in recording and materials technology, as well as the organized development of independent distributors, DIY and small independent labels can almost stand on the same level as the money-fueled mainstream.

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