

THE INDIE MUSICIAN'S GUIDEBOOK

First Edition



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*This ebook is dedicated to the Music
and to my desire that it may never rest in peace.*

INTRODUCTION



While you can jump to the end to find out more about who I am and what I do, I wanted to introduce the subject matter and scope of this book. First, this book is not going to tell you how to do everything it talks about. If I put everything I knew in here, I'd have to cite thousands of sources and at this time, I'm not prepared for such an undertaking. I actually started writing this book (and may later expand it into a larger work) and the first version had over 40 thousand words when I was only halfway through one of the first chapters (by comparison this one is less than five thousand words). What this book is is a brief summary of the steps that I feel need to be considered for someone who is making music today because some of these things, I had personally never thought of in-depth when I got into this business.

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF AS AN ARTIST



Why do you make music? Is it to express yourself and your ideas? Is it to entertain large groups of people? Do you do it or want to do it as a means for generating income? Is it a hobby?

Questions like those listed above are ones you should ask yourself because they help define what success is for you. For example, you may have an interest in touring the world with your hit songs or you may be happier singing songs at weddings. The choice is up to you, but it will also partially decide your audience. This is a deep subject, but for now, think about what brought you to music. Often musicians and songwriters find themselves through the music and your reason or motivation can and probably will change throughout your life.

(By the way, for those who think that you can't express yourself and entertain large groups of people AND make money - you're wrong.)

THE AUDIENCE



The audience for a death metal band is probably gonna be different than the audience for a polka band, although there are always exceptions. Still you may only be interested in making music for yourself and not worrying about it comes across to anyone else. Some people make music for themselves; to express themselves or to work through what they are going through in their lives and that is 100% perfectly okay.

Other people make music specifically for other people like children or Latin jazz enthusiasts. Of course, there are people who do both and those people craft songs and music finding a balance of expression while also taking into consideration what the audience will perceive. Any choice of audience is valid, but it will help decide what kind of music you will make.

Personally, I believe we are entering an era of “post-pop” where it's more about finding your audience and providing value to them than playing a certain type of music to be “successful”. There is no reason a 50's swing band should be doomed to find an audience as long as they are being of service and willing to put in some work.

INSTRUMENTALISTS, MUSICIANS, AND BEATMAKERS



Music is a universal language, but just as there are many dialects within a language, so are there many genres and sub-genres within the broad spectrum of musical styles. Defining your audience allows you to choose your dialect.

If you're making music for yourself, then you are free to do whatever you want. There are no rules to break unless you decide to make rules in the first place. You may have chosen your audience to be people who want to hear cover songs, so you'll have to bend a little toward that. Or perhaps you've picked out an audience of hip hop who want a specific style or appreciate certain values; well, you'll need to work toward that.

Even if you want to perform music you've written, you'll be choosing a style or styles of music – maybe a whole new blend. In any event, your choice on music will have a large effect on deciding how your lyrics will “feel”. Taking time to make sure the music matches the emotion is important no matter the genre or subject matter.

SINGERS AND RAPPERS



Whether you sing or you rap, whatever you do as a lead vocalist really defines so much. It defines much of who you are. It's your voice. This goes for lead instrumentalists as well like guitarists or saxophonists.

Thinking about how the lead is going to set the tone is important because choosing to sing a part with a falsetto, rap with a bunch of aggression or scream with joy conveys the humanity in the song. It's the part of the song that most people will focus on to find connection.

A good singer or rapper can pull listeners in, but songwriting is powerful tool that can be used to keep the listener listening because songwriting and the performance is more important than vocal abilities alone.

SONGWRITERS



With an audience chosen, the craft of songwriting can be a method to organize thoughts for one's self or for a story line. Studying and practicing different styles can give you more power than almost anyone in the music business.

Songwriting isn't just the lyrics because a song is lyrics and music married together, so instrumentalists who write parts should think of this as well. There are many technically incredible guitar players, but the ones who can tell a story with their playing are writing songs that touch people. Even in most jazz, there is a story. (And a lack of story is a story too so...)

There's also plenty of singers and rappers out there, but if you can write a song then you've got the basis for a product. And that product can be for yourself, for one other person, for the masses or you can work on finding a balance for the end result.

The point is that songwriting is where communication really takes root after the bed is made and there are also songwriters who just write lyrics without any music at all.

COPYRIGHT AND PUBLISHING



After you've written a song, you'll probably want to copyright it. Technically, at least in the US, intellectual property is automatically copyrighted the moment it's recorded in a tangible form outside the mind, but that aside, basically, a copyright protects your song from other people copying it and profiting off it without credit being given to you as you choose by registering your intellectual property with various entities. You can go the route with the government which in the US is done through <http://www.Copyright.gov> or Creative Commons which is a little different, but allows for less formalities and some flexibility in certain ways.

Publishing is essentially any time your song is posted in some public way like on a blog, on a streaming service or in a music video. There is also the type and side of publishing that deals with getting your music paired with commercials and film among other things.

Things like copyright and publishing apply to even the most basic idea of your song. You could copyright a version of a song you wrote and recorded singing into your phone while playing an acoustic guitar and then later record a version with a full band and the second version would be considered a derivative of the first, so you'd still be safe although you could and probably should copyright the second version too.

PREPRODUCTION AND ARRANGEMENT



Deciding what you want to do with a song helps point toward the preproduction and arrangement. By here, you've picked a target audience, a style of music, end goal of the song, the song's story, etc and now it's time to decide how you want the story to be told. Preproduction is choosing additional instruments to record or if the song is in a good key for the singer or maybe the tempo - It's considering the end product.

The arrangement plays a major role here too in deciding how the song will be perceived. And this points to how the song will be recorded and come to its final production. Preproduction, arrangement, recording, production, mixing and mastering often have overlaps nowadays.

In fact, after the whole song is recorded and mastered, it's entirely possible that you may want to change a word or a verse or turn the bridge into a prechorus and write a brand new bridge. The order isn't in stone, so don't feel restricted. These steps are more of a guide than rules.

You can also try recording demos on your phone or playing the songs on your acoustic guitar, piano or live to the beat to test out song structures. Write and rewrite. A great song will sound great even without all the special effects. Try to figure out rhythms, dynamics, words and other important bones of the song **before** recording.

RECORDING AND PRODUCTION



When you choose how you want the song to sound, you're also narrowing the method recording... sort of. This is where some sonic creativity comes into play. You might not be able to record under the ocean, but you can think of some ways to make it sound that way if you try. In modern recording, I think this is one of the most overlooked points. Musicians/Songwriters/Producers grab up loops or try to tone match too much and it's easy to leave it up to the mix engineer to fix it in the mix, however it's better to get it right going into the recording. If sufficient time is spent finding a good sound, then many unnecessary headaches from replacement/reamping can be avoided. Whether you need it to sound like you're in a big space or like an intimate room, your recording method will play a part but it's not a hard limit ceiling.

How you record also leads into how you're producing the final record and how you produce also loops back into how you record such whether you're working with a separate producer or by yourself although it actually doesn't matter where in this cycle you enter, just as long as you can get through them so your song can be mixed (or you can mix a bit while you go).

I have to point out that recording equipment is becoming so cheap that you can make an award-winning song with less than \$400 worth of gear, so there's no excuse.

MIXING AND MASTERING



With music, lyrics and any and everything else recorded, you're moving on to mixing. Mixing helps bring balance to recordings so they sound a bit more polished. Many people mix while they record while others send their songs off to be mixed by other people. Having chosen an audience, your approach to the performance and songwriting, etc, you will find you've also chosen what's best for mixing.

If you're creating songs you want to sound good to a wider audience, then you may find it's necessary to employ a mix engineer who can help your song translate well in different situations (like in radio/playlist rotation with other songs) and give your song some sparkle or you may be satisfied with mixing your own music (the latter is quite the challenge sometimes).

Mastering is basically the last stop before releasing a song or album. Some people skip it, but if you're making music that will be heard along side other people's music like on the radio, then the skills of a mastering engineer can help give your song that last little push as well as making sure the mix stands up well against songs in a similar genre as far as things like volume and the EQ curve. It's no substitution for great songwriting and mixing, but it's more like the shine on the cherry on top. Mastering can also dictate where the music can or should be distributed.

DISTRIBUTION



Once a song is recorded, if you want people to hear it, then you'll need to distribute it. You could also just perform the song out on tour and consider that distribution actually. However, having a solid plan for distribution will make further steps easier and efforts more successful.

There are many companies and methods that get your music into the ears of both fans and potential fans, but be aware that this ties into your marketing plan. Make sure your distribution and marketing work together whether you choose to do limited copies on vinyl, release only to your subscribers, you give it away online for free or you strike a deal with a company or label to take care of distribution for you.

That brings us to marketing...

MARKETING



If you know your audience, then marketing your song is easier. You have already decided who you want to hear your music, so now it's a question of how to find and engage those people. At this point, many musicians, songwriters, rappers, etc fail short of giving proper time to one of the most important aspects of the business. I say business, because if you are going to think about growing your fan base, then you are starting to think of music as a business which is a good thing if you want to make a profit. Making a profit is also what separates the majority of the semi-pros and the pros. Without financial profit, aside from its therapeutic benefits, music making can be a very expensive hobby. Very often, I see musicians who either do one of two things:

- 1.) They make a great record and then don't promote it
- 2.) Or they make a terrible record, promote it and get upset when they don't see the response they wanted.

Marketing is a science and as such requires experimentation and study. Learning about this field is a huge undertaking, but the knowledge and insight it brings will yield dividends and profits which segue into thinking of multiple streams of income.

ADDITIONAL STREAMS OF INCOME



While there's nothing wrong with making music without a focus on making money, there's also nothing wrong with receiving fair compensation for your art. You can find the balance between making a living and doing what you want to do if you maximize or at least increase your song's potential to create revenue. This can include selling merch, getting a sponsorship from a private company, performing at festivals, leasing your music to film and television or any number of other things. Every dollar adds up.

The way I prefer to think of it is to take the amount of money coming in and divide that by the number of hours it takes to make that figure. For example, if you sell your CD at the gas station 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, 40 hours a week and you manage to sell 5 CDs a day at \$10 each, then you're at \$50/day, \$250/week, etc but that still doesn't take into consideration CD costs, the food and water it takes to fuel you, your rest time, the recording costs, etc. Creating more streams can help increase income.

Recorded music might cost end users less than a penny a listen, but T-shirts and show tickets are still up there. In fact, show tickets are probably more expensive for concert goers now more than ever as the shows are becoming more complex. There are many ways to make money in music, but as with many business ventures, it usually takes money to make money. Just remember that your time is money too, so don't forget you can invest it if you don't have the cash on hand. You could start your own official small business (which I recommend) and take a loan too (which I don't recommend in most cases). However, if you don't want to deal with all the aforementioned, besides the entrepreneurship part, then that leads us to companies that offer business to business solutions and record labels.

GETTING SIGNED TO A LABEL



Not everyone wants to be on a label and not everyone needs to sign to one. In fact, some of the most successful and biggest names in music recently have created their own labels. You can do that too. There's smaller labels, vanity labels, specialty labels and the majors. Some people love major labels because often the record label will take care of the business side of music so the artist can focus fully on music and songwriting and touring, but signing to a label isn't a requirement unless you choose for it to be and it definitely isn't a guarantee of making more money either. Still other artists decide to sign with a smaller label because they feel they'll get more attention, more artistic freedom or just a better deal.

Most labels either want to release music to a specific audience out of passion, for monetary gain or a combination of the two. If you're looking to be signed to a label that is interested in making money, then you need to ask yourself what you are providing in return for their services. If a label signs you, they would normally invest time and money into you, but they'll want that money back with a percentage of the profits. Think of them as investors or a bank that could potentially give you a loan for your business. Everyone's case is different though, but I recommend thinking of signing to any label as an option rather than an end goal in general.

WHAT YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED



I actually decided to add this chapter a couple days after writing this guidebook after I addressed someone's post online. The artist was asking about why he wasn't getting any responses from managers to whom he'd been reaching out. He said that someone high up in the business had told him he needed a manager to get him to the next level... I had a couple questions myself though before I could answer him. Just like there are artists who are making music for fun and don't do it for the money, there are managers like that too. That's awesome if you find one. However, for those managers are doing this that love the music and also want to make money, there are some considerations that should be noted. Most managers either work for a flat rate or a percentage. There are managers who might see great potential in you and will want to help, but being a manager is time-consuming gig. I won't go into all the details, but the job can include making sure everything I've covered so far gets done and more such as working with the artist on a personal level and dealing with any problems hindering progress. Managers who are working on a commission often receive 10-15%, so let's take that number as an example.

If an artist has an income of \$100,000/yr from music, it may sound like a lot of money, but it's really not and here's why it's not. At 15%, the manager's cut would be \$15,000/yr. If a manager works 52 weeks/year, 40 hours/week, that breaks down to about \$288/week or approximately \$7.21/hour and that's before taxes so (being generous) let's say \$6.21/hour for the manager's efforts.

So for a manager to be making as much as someone in a fast food restaurant, with similar circumstances, the artist would need to bring in closer to a quarter of a million dollars (preferably profit obviously, so about half a million gross).

The artist I responded to online said he made about \$20,000/yr from music.

I didn't even address the issue of whether this was gross income or net or even taxes on his side so he could've even been losing money possibly just to make some money. Everyone's situation is different and there are managers willing to take a risk, so I encourage people to find them, but I think there's better things you could be focusing on... like making great music.

If you think you need the hottest producer, a magic manager, to get signed to a major label, the right mix, a better voice, or if you think everyone else needs to change and appreciate “good and different” music, then while there may be some room for improvement in your current situation, really what anyone needs is a great song (possibly recorded) and to be able to connect with other people using music to be able to “make it” in almost any sense, so focus on those things first.

A quick recap, understand yourself or at least try to. That's gonna help you figure out who your audience is (or if you even want one). Making music is what separates this from simple storytelling, but the music is more powerful when used to tell a story and if you're the singer (or lead instrumentalist) then there's a lot of expectation and responsibility on you. It's your choice whether that's a blessing, a curse, or a bit of both. Personally, I see us getting to a point where copyright and publishing won't be important or needed, but while it's still in fashion, take care of it. With the internet, it's easier than ever to do all this with nothing more than a smartphone. Preproduction, arrangement, recording, production, mixing, mastering on through to distribution, marketing and so on can all be accomplished on a smartphone too. There are tools and gear that can make it easier or more complicated, but what I want to drive home is that it's absolutely possible.

You can do it and don't skip any of those steps because they all have a reason for being a step. Each one can go as deep as you want. You can spend a decade trying out different mics on amps for your recordings or work with a producer, make ads or hire a marketing firm, but whatever you do, just think about the big picture. And remember, the more you understand about music and the business, the easier it all becomes. Making money will help you understand more about your own music too, but music sucks when it's all about the money – so find your balance. Lastly, you don't need what you don't need, but if you want some help, well that brings us to the next chapter...

What I'm Doing Now



The goal I have with *Indie Musician Services* is mostly to be of service to independent musicians. In truth, most of the successful independent musicians are actually interdependent. They work with or direct people to help make the machine work. It is almost impossible to do all the stuff needed to make an album alone which can include but isn't limited to distribution, promotion, driving the tour bus, running the sound, designing shirts, working the merch booth, booking the shows, analyzing data, shooting and editing the music videos, etc.

I've spent the better part of 25 years working in the entertainment industry as a child actor, a professional national touring and recording artist as well as having run multiple small businesses where I learned about things like marketing, sales, customer service, product design. I can also play over 20 instruments, run live sound, mix a record, write songs, and even booked my own national tours across the US to promote myself. Since then I've set up a modest private home studio in Las Vegas where I've been recording friends and sharpening my engineering skills. I also co-host one of the best open mics in my city and work with multiple artists as a consultant or freelance worker in miscellaneous music-related gigs.

Although I'm an artist first, after turning down the opportunity to continue working with a major label, I delved into finding out everything I could about the music business from an indie perspective. I took classes, went to seminars, got involved with my PRO, read books, read the magazines, and watched the videos, not only about music, but about business in general to expand my understanding of marketing, social media, sales, time management, logistics, e-commerce, web site design, graphic design and more. I also started helping other artists by helping run a music store, lesson studio, and a recording studio in Georgia. I became an even bigger fan of music than I started out as. Now I have plans to put more focus on my own music, but I want to share all these “secrets” I've learned. Through the site, I'll be releasing free content that explores specific topics in greater detail and I'll be hosting live seminars to answer questions because so much was passed on to me for free.

I've been gathering pieces for decades and I still keep up with the music news like new laws and companies that are entering the business and I want to pass that on to you. By now you may want to know what's in it for me to gain; the answer is two-fold.

First, I get the satisfaction of knowing I'm doing my part by giving back to the community and, second, I want the opportunity to add another stream of income for myself. The way I can make money is by trading out my time. I'll give away as much “free” time as I can, but if I need to take time away from my own music and other business ventures, then I'm asking to be compensated for my time – I'll try and keep it cheap. If you have a question, post it in one of the appropriate public forums or you can contact me privately as well and I'll try my best to answer you. However, I'm also going to make the option available for you book some personal one-on-one consultation time via a private video conference call, a voice call, or in person too if someone wants to talk specifics or if maybe I can help some other way.

In any event, whether you're just starting out or you're feeling stuck, I hope this can make the journey in music go a more smoothly for you. I wish you all the success in the world, so rock on and keep up.

Yours Truly,

Coop

TESTIMONIALS



Mizz Absurd. (Singer, Songwriter, Bassist, Avant Garde Jazz, Caberet)
www.MizzAbsurd.com

Recording/Mixing, Marketing, Web Design, Merch, Business Consultation

"Coop's extensive experience and musical life skills are only superseded by his passion for arts and the artist. His multi-dimensional talents cover the spectrum of music from performing, recording, touring, business, multi-media, etc. He uses this to help guide and drive his artists in development to reach their highest potential. Working with Coop has brought great direction in my career as a reliable advisor and confidant. I refer to him as my "Guru" and the "Indie Quincy Jones."



Sonia Barcelona. (Smooth Jazz, Bossa Nova)
www.ArtofSonia.com

Recording, Mixing, Production and Business Consultation, Session Work

"Coop is a wonderful musician, great guitarist/multi-instrumentalist, singer, and performer. As a musician I've learned so much from him about the music business and he's definitely helped me grow as an artist. I would definitely recommend him for any studio sessions since he's such a relaxed guy and super open to new ideas."



Jessica Manalo. (Singer, R&B, Indie Songwriter)
www.JessicaManalo.com

Lead/Rhythm Guitar, Live Show Support Regional Touring, Recording, Mixing, Production, Business Consultation

"Cooper really feels the music, it doesn't matter what the genre is. He's my number one to go to when I need help adding a little more flavor and soul into my music. Love him!"



Cameron Calloway. (Soul, Singer, Songwriter)
www.CameronCalloway.com

Business Consultation

"Coops understanding for the essence of music is impeccable! His spirit is what's needed is today's music because he brings a sense of awareness that truly cares about the art form. He possesses an old music soul it's golden but most importantly timeless."



Rob Hau of Pure Joy People. (Rock and Soul, Indie Pop, Psychedelic, Funk)
www.PureJoyPeople.com

Recording, Mixing, Production and Business Consultation, Session Work

"Coop is an excellent multi instrumentalist with mad feeling and heart to go along with serious skill! I worked with him recording some key parts and guitar melodies/solos. It was a breeze! Not to mention he's an amazing singer songwriter on top of that 😊."

Although I may get to writing a full book, I regularly have one-on-one consultations here in Las Vegas with artists all over the world that last hours. I can help with publishing to drop-shipping to web design to marketing to live show setups to tour planning and a whole lot more. Basically, I want to help you make more music and money with less wasted time and money. I will be posting videos that go deeper into different facets of music over time that you'll be able to view for FREE on www.IndieMusicianServices.com among other places.