

Crankin' It out

a guide to cutting your own CDs

By Timber Masterson

I always thought there was someone out there who would listen to me play the piano at some late night haunt and hear that special something in my music. This person would come over to me and say, "Hey you've got a good look and some workable tunes, let's set you up with a producer." Then they'd pick up the phone and order Phad Thai and a café au lait for me. Unfortunately, that's not the way it works.

After many years of persevering, honing my craft, and recording my tunes (and drinking lots of coffee in various late night studios), I've finally cut my first record. An extended, tedious, life-long project it has been, and I was fortunate enough to have a friend, who records in his own studio, offer to help me out and work with me. The rest is history.

Do I have to sleep with someone behind the major label curtain to get a deal?

Producing your own independent album can be a confusing process. You are twenty-something and have been playing music for the majority of your life and now you've decided to really get it together. You say to yourself, "Why can't I be the one to get my stuff out there? Do I have to sleep with someone behind the major label curtain? Should I make a tape and stand out on the corner and give away free muffins with it?" Frustration can take hold of you, especially when there isn't anyone to lead you down the informational garden path.

Prospective musical entrepreneurs can take heart, however. Practically anyone can make a CD and get it heard on the

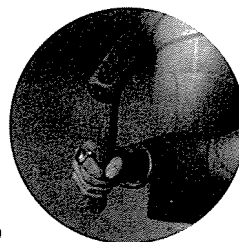
radio without being signed to some big old scary label. (Although being backed by the big guns has its advantages, like being able to hang out with secretaries and drop comments such as, "Yeah, I've got a deal" at social gatherings.)

Before you begin the long road to musical stardom, be forewarned: putting out your own CD can be very fulfilling but you must possess the versatility to wear many different hats. (Not literally, although that may be an asset during photo shoots.) You must be an arranger, producer, publicist, promoter, and image creator all in one.

The first thing you need to do is get the shekels together. This means bucks, so whether you choose to sell your exotic

goldfish collection, borrow from granny, or open a lemonade stand to get those all-essential dollars together, you must go into it with the attitude: "I am going to do it no matter what." You have got to be focused and determined as the music business ain't made up of kind fellows eager to help talented young musicians. (There are a few programs however, such as FACTOR - Financial Aid for Canadian Talent - that can help you in your endeavor—see sidebar.)

The amount of money you'll need depends on the type of music and the number of songs you're recording, and the quality of the producer. Once you've got the bucks, hunt around for the best deal.



Improved technology means one doesn't have to spend \$300 an hour in a 36-track studio to make a top-notch recording of the songs to be released, no matter what genre

of music it is. Try to find a studio with an engineer (preferably one not consistently on reefer) who will actually take interest in your music and listen to what you have to say. Remember it's your creative process, not someone else's. Ask around; studios' reputations precede themselves. Or you could be like Beck who recorded his album *One Foot in the Grave* in his living room. And look how successful he was!

After you've chosen your studio and recorded your album onto a computer or reel-to-reel, it's time to put it to D.A.T. (digital audio tape). This is the master tape needed to make the copies of your CD, tape, or record. CDs are the most expensive to create, followed by records and then tapes. The cost for making 1,000 CDs can range from about \$2,500 to \$4,000 including artwork. Vinyl costs a bit less and is the way to go if you're involved with the dance music thing, because DJs will play your stuff in clubs.

Now comes the real test in all of this seemingly attainable glitter: how to get your musical genius to the rest of the world. There are many ways to go about it, but know this before you begin: since you don't have the backing of a major label to help promote your album, it will be time-consuming and costly. Practically all stores, if they like it, will just take your product on consignment, which means you don't get a buck unless it sells. "It's cool that there are more stores that feature an alternative indie section," says Canadian independent band leader Big Rude Jake, who produced his first CD, *Butane Fumes and Bad Cologne*, and

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Photo by John Ortner

peddled it across the country. "The problem is most stores will only stock five, ten, or maybe 15 at a time so you and you alone must keep track of what's going on."

If you are performing live, make sure you set up some sort of booth at the venue. Sell your album, T-shirts, whatever it takes. You could also have a release party. Invite photographers and writers to the show, and remember that any publicity you can weasel is good publicity. Have someone design a cool logo for the cover, something that will grab people's attention.

Connections are always the way to go if you're a good shmoozer; a friend of a friend knows a barber who cuts the hair of one of the roadies for Pursuit of Happiness' third violinist. Bonus.

Most musicians feel that if they can get somebody from the record company to listen to their material they'll be signed, no questions asked. Another misconception. Here's a hint: if you can, take music people to lunch; they like expensive food. Record labels tend to favour artists who already have ten songs recorded and produced, so all they have to do is package it. "A rack job" is another kind of deal that you can have with a major label. They'll distribute your product to all the necessary stores so you get to take total creative control while you're recording. Of course, the company will take a cut of your earnings.

"You have to plan to give away a lot of product," says Big Rude Jake. "We planned on 100 and we probably gave out 500. But I met a lot of people by doing shows, jams, and by getting involved in the musical community and sitting in on other people's sessions. You gotta get out there. Someone like Loreena McKennitt is the ultimate example. She still works out of her home checking out where her stuff

is selling and doing the whole damn shebang herself."

There are definite advantages to creating your own CDs. Some artists claim that getting signed to a record company means they will not have any say in what they do. Others never make money on their album, even if it does well, because the company needs to be paid back. If you do it alone, all the money comes back to you. Here are just a few artists who decided to take the plunge themselves: Bourbon Tabernacle Choir (distributed by Cargo Records), Moxy Früvous, Wild Strawberries, Tom Cochrane, and Jane Siberry. There are countless others, just check them out at your local music shop. The great thing about producing your own CD is you don't need a record company, you just need passion and your own vision. **O**

Model: Dean from Giovanni. Digital Imaging: Lorena Barrera. Thanks to Dan at Duck Tail Inn.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MAKING YOUR OWN CD CONTACT:

FACTOR: Financial Aid for Canadian Talent

Provides funding for sound recordings and videos for Canadian artists

Head Office: 416-368-8678

Affiliate Contacts:

NB: Glenn Ingersoll, 506-455-8863

SASK: Greg Kurtz, 306-347-0676

BC: Ellie O'Day, 604-873-1914

SOCAN: Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada

Helps their members with the details of licensing and copyright fees

ONT: 1-800-557-6226

BC: 1-800-937-6226

QUE: 1-800-797-6226

CIRPA: Canadian Independent Record Production Association

Helps Canadian-owned labels plug into the label network, and lobbies for the recording industry

Head Office: 416-593-1665

