Chapter One

Understanding the Recording Industry: What is it?

It all begins with a song. Everything in the multi-billion dollar music industry revolves around a song that someone, like you or me, has written. We perform that song. We print it as sheet music. We record it, play it on the radio, and make CDs and digital downloads to sell. We use it in movies, TV, video games, and cell phones. We sell t-shirts for bands that get famous from that song. We even let others play our song by manufacturing instruments that the public can buy and learn to play at home or school. All the money flowing through this industry originates from the creative talents of a songwriter.

We can then suppose that because of this, the most lucrative career in this business would be as a songwriter. That's true to a large extent. If you write a successful song, all the various uses of that song result in money paid back to you in the form of royalties, as long as your contracts are fairly written. However, not all of us are songwriters, and there are enough bad ones out there already. What can you do in the music industry to make a living? Plenty! There's a huge production and support structure for making money with those songs, and lots of opportunities for you to find a career that not only pays the bills, but lets you enjoy going to work each day.

Today's music industry involves people and skills of all types: songwriting, performance, technology and engineering, manufacturing, business, law, and countless other support areas. No matter what your particular interest and area of expertise you can work with music somehow, somewhere.

If your interest is in technology, there are lots of opportunities for individuals knowledgeable and skilled in the use of technology to produce music in all its various forms and formats. This includes pre-recorded music for various DVD formats, compact discs and ringtones, music produced for video or movies, music and sound for games and websites, and also production of live sound events, including concerts and interactive media presentations.

If you want to be successful in the field of music technology you've got to become fluent in a variety of areas including computers, audio equipment and processes, business, and above all, the knowledge and development of musical skills. Too much of today's music suffers from an over-reliance on technology and tricks. Quality music composition and production from an artistic perspective is needed to produce material of lasting enjoyment and use. You don't necessarily need to be a fluent recitalist, but you should be able to talk music-speak and develop a musical ear. This will enable you to work much more effectively with other professionals and earn respect from the musicians working on your projects.

The same goes for people wanting to work on the business side of things. The more you know about music the better you can relate to the product and people you're working with. Ever go into an electronics store, ask a clerk about some audio receiver, and get some completely idiotic babble about how cool it looks and what the extended warrantee costs? Ever go to the record store and ask a clerk about what they know of a certain group? Wouldn't you want the music publishers who are selling arrangements to your high school choral and band director to actually know

something about the music they are putting together? The more you know, the more you benefit, along with your clients and employers.

You will also discover that along with developing specific job-related skills you must demonstrate a willingness to work, learn, and interact with people. If you have an arrogant, unmotivated attitude your first job may be your last. The music industry is a relatively small one--there's no room for people who spend their efforts trying to prove their stuff. I once hired a couple of horn players for an album overdub session who showed up with white gloves and polished instruments. They played decently, but none of us could put up with their incredible attitude—they never worked there again. Just do your thing, work with people, help others as you go along, and it will always pay off in the long run. You will never know it all--there's always something you can learn from anybody you run into. Ask intelligent questions and don't bluff your way through life like you're the recording guru sent down from Mt. Olympus.

You will not be working in a vacuum out there—this is a people-oriented business, so learn how to communicate (written and oral), learn how to get along, and be ready to listen to a wide variety of ideas that may or may not agree with your own. That's what makes things grow and progress—open your minds and enjoy the interaction.

You've got to get out and talk to people. If you sit at home waiting for the phone to ring you'll get nowhere. Networking is the key to this business—the more people who know you, know what you're good at, and enjoy talking and working with you, the more opportunities will open up over time.

Music Technology Opportunities

You never know exactly what you'll be doing in five, ten or twenty years. Don't set your sights too narrowly; keep an open mind and learn to take advantage of the unexpected opportunities that come your way. There are many different applications for using technology in producing music. The most obvious is producing albums in a recording studio. Probably ninety-percent of all students who audition for our college's degree program expect to become recording engineers making rock and roll albums. There are two main issues to point out about this expectation. First, there are practically no jobs out there just waiting for you and hoping you'll show up. There are scads of people like yourself who want to record Sting or Madonna. Second, getting into this aspect of the business is very tiring, very trying, and offers very little in the way of reward for a long time—if ever. A few will successfully become big-name engineers in this area, but most people should open their eyes and look to what's happening in the industry these days.

The two main events that are providing opportunities are video-related and mobile applications. Just look at all the TV programming, video production, film, and interactive websites around you. The current growth in media demand for cellphones, iPods, and other portable devices is meteoric. And it just keeps growing and growing. All this, my friends, requires lots of audio production, which means lots of jobs for you. This may mean sitting in a small room working on a computer workstation synchronizing screeching tires to BMW commercials or working in a project studio developing sound snippets for the latest X-Box release—that's where the money is. It's a visual, mobile media world, and anything with video automatically brings audio along for the ride. Seen any silent films lately?

There's lots of talk about some pretty big studios closing shop around the country. Does this mean the recording industry is dying? Hardly? Not all of these shutdowns are due to lack of business,

and as we speak there are other pretty big studios being opened regularly. Much of today's production only requires smaller facilities that can fit into your office. There is a *ton* of audio production required these days—you simply have to look in different places to find it.

So keep your options open. You can do several things for now—keep reading this book to learn more about fundamental studio recording concepts, which are valid for all the production needs in these various fields. Read industry magazines such as Billboard and Mix to keep up with where things are heading. The more knowledgeable you are about the real world the better you can prepare and tailor your skills and background.

Music Business Opportunities

Technology-related work is only a small slice of the overall music industry. No matter what interests you in life, you can probably find a job doing that in some aspect of the music biz.

Think about the many types of jobs you would find in any industry: executives, managers, salespeople, attorneys, marketing execs, programmers, writers, graphic artists, editors, design engineers, the list keeps going. What this means to you is that you can follow your parents' wish to become a lawyer (only if you really want to) and spend your days negotiating contracts in the biz, rather than editing commas in shipping contracts with a tire company. Here is a short list to give you some ideas:

- Design, manufacture, and sales of musical instruments
- Design, manufacture, and sales of recording and PA equipment
- Editing, printing, and sales of sheet music, books, scores
- Management and operation of record companies
- Management and operation of publishing companies
- Management and operation of radio stations
- Computer software development and sales
- Legal counsel (copyrights, recording contracts, publishing contracts)
- Non-profit performance institutions (orchestras, opera houses)
- Archival institutions (music preservation)
- Entertainment publishers (magazines)
- and lots, lots more…

What about performers?

Some of you really, really want to play, and so the often-asked question is "so what can I do as a player?" The answer is not so simple, unfortunately. There are few positions available for full-time players, whether you're interested in an orchestra seat or laying tracks as a studio musician. The competition is absolutely fierce, and even the top players have a very difficult time finding work. I don't want to discourage the better musicians out there who are in fact good enough to play for a living, but you should know the limitations and obstacles and plan accordingly. Planning means you can still find work in the music business and play on the side. It's better to sell guitars than French fries, right?

Playing jobs can include:

- Studio musicians / vocalists
- Live concert musicians / vocalists
- Orchestras, chamber groups, etc.
- Regional gig player (plays on traveling shows, concerts, special events)

Some musicians these days are selling their wares by self-producing recordings of samples, segments, or entire songs for the host of media producers out there. This can be done at home or in a small project studio for those who are tech-savvy. It pays to develop skills besides scales and rudiments. Traditionally, many performers supplement their income by teaching private lessons at a local school or music store. You can make a decent living doing this, but it takes time to build up your student roster and get your name on the list for gigs as they come up. Talk to professional players in your area and get their story—see if it's something you want to pursue. You don't want to give up your dream as a musician, but you also need to understand the reality of what's feasible and the route required to get there.

What's this book about?

This text and accompanying compact disc is primarily designed to help you learn how the recording studio works, how recordings are made, and get you started understanding and using the equipment. However, I've included a few chapters at the beginning to provide an overview of the business side of things, at least as it pertains to the making and selling of music and records. You need to know how studio production fits into the big scheme of things. Some of you are interested in selling your own music, selling yourselves as recording artists, or working somewhere in the recording industry. Many of you want to be recording engineers—that's fine, but perhaps we can open a few other doors to expand your options and get you thinking.

The majority of the book focuses on studio production, including learning how recording consoles work, understanding signal flow between microphones and recorders, and getting you to start listening critically to various miking setups, signal processing, and mixing techniques. The college course this text is based on is structured somewhat uniquely. Instead of plunging directly into the theoretical details, which probably mean little to you at this stage, the art of recording music will be demonstrated in context. All the relevant terminology and theory will be covered, but in context of specific applications, not as separate chapter studies. Therefore the first part of the course will break down the stages of multitrack recording.

In order to familiarize you with the studio equipment and operations, mixdown procedures will be discussed and practiced before anything else. This eliminates the pressure of having musicians in the adjacent room waiting for a novice engineer to figure out what they're doing. Mixing involves use of all the equipment located in the control room and allows learning of signal flow in the studio. It also facilitates an end-appreciation for how tracking sessions should be handled.

After you've gotten the gist of mixdown and basically how the gear works, we'll go over tracking and overdubbing concepts. Tips on mastering projects will also be provided so you can avoid common problems that trip up even the professionals. Once you understand how the process works and have a functional familiarity with the equipment, we'll go back and explain the specifics in greater detail in the latter chapters of this book. Recording console functions and signal flow, microphone design and technique, multitrack recorder operation, and use of outboard processing will be discussed and demonstrated. At this time context for this information will have been established, hopefully providing a fuller understanding of the material. This text doesn't

pretend to cover great detail of audio theory. There are many fine books available that you can use as references to back up what we discuss here.

It's very important to understand the educational design behind this book and CD. Many people these days think all they have to do is learn how to get signal into Pro Tools and work the plug-ins to be an engineer. Hardly. If you want to be a *real* engineer, one who really understands this stuff and can work like a pro for years to come, then you need to think a little deeper. The goal is *not* learning how to use a specific recording console or recording system. If you learn the standard features, controls, and operations that all mixers have in common, then you can learn how to use any specific console or DAW (digital audio workstation). Simply look for those standard patterns and see where they are on that particular system. To do this you need to spend adequate time reading the book, listening to the audio examples, and practicing in the studio. If you don't, you are taking shortcuts that will prevent you, or at the very least delay you, from learning the essence of studio production. Not understanding these concepts leads to frustration and a lack of ability to adapt to different or unexpected circumstances. I see it every year with students and can only restate over and over what this paragraph is saying. Trust me!

Is this applicable to your PC-based recording software? Absolutely—the basics never change. If you learn the generic concepts, you can transfer that knowledge to *any* system, whether it be a large format analog console or a software-based ProTools rig. That's what makes this text and CD effective. The emphasis is on understanding signal routing, the skilled use of microphones, processing, and mixing. The equipment and end product may change over time, but the fundamentals and artistic concepts never do.

What's next?

We'll start by discussing the life-blood of the industry—songs—and how they can make money. You need to know the various income options (licensing) and how songwriters can get their material to the public to generate income (publishing). If you're dead-set on getting into the studio stuff, that's okay. You can read through the studio chapters and check out the CD, but make sure you review the first few chapters at some point so you know how the recording aspects fit into the overall picture of the industry.