

A Musicians Guide to Caring for Your Recordist

by Larry Crane

In the past I've written many End Rants about how I expect recordists to treat their clients. But I've also stumbled across many online forums where I've seen recording engineers and producers bitching about musicians and sessions. This End Rant is not me complaining about my sessions and clients. I have taught myself to communicate well and keep a good attitude. As a result I enjoy myself in the studio, even if it involves hard work. This Rant is for musicians heading into the studio, and how to get more out of recording sessions by treating their recordist with the same respect that they are (or should be) bringing to you. This is also not exclusive to "professional" studio situations; I've seen lots of abuse and confusion when a hobbyist opens their studio to a friend. So take note of this guide for any recording collaboration.

- ✓ Set working hours, and stick to them. This allows everyone to plan for a life outside of the session. Hint: Shorter days will make people show up on time and stay to the end. Long, open-ended sessions frequently means sitting around for hours waiting for people to arrive.

- ✓ Don't show up ridiculously early. I've had clients show up an hour before their scheduled time, wanting to start loading in, and asking me where to set up before I've even cleaned up the studio or had my coffee! You're basically asking for free studio time if you do this.

- ✓ Don't continually ask your recordist if they like the material you are recording. The fact that they have already agreed to work on your music should be your answer.

- ✓ When booking the session, ask what the recordists' preferred means of communication is. I prefer to book and prepare for my session via email, so I can keep a record of what we will be doing. Phone calls can be handy for sorting out an overall approach or needs of a session, but getting something written down helps. **My personal worst is getting various phone calls, texts, Facebook messages, and emails for the same session, and never being able to collate the info in one place for my reference.**

- ✓ Work out financial details long before you enter the studio. Make sure you understand what the rates are, how to pay, and when money is due. Make sure you understand what a deposit means, if they have one, and what the terms are. If someone gives you a discount of any sort, note that and be appreciative, but do not request that discount on your next booking. The majority of discounts are on a case by case basis and are not meant to infer a new, lower set rate.

- ✓ If you've hired a producer/engineer with experience, let them set the pace and flow of the session. Don't push them faster just because you might be feeling nervous or worried. A pro will have budgeted time correctly; trust that you are in good hands.

- ✓ Let the recordist work on your sounds, or mix, for some degree of time before making suggestions. Give them time to listen to a song all the way through before trying to explain everything you think about a song or mix. Let them ask the first question; frequently it will also answer many that you already have.

- ✓ Recordists need to eat, breathe, use the restroom, and sometimes even take short breaks just like everyone else. Studio time can be expensive, but the most productive sessions I've seen include breather moments, where everyone can stretch and take care of needs. As the client, it is a courtesy to extend a moment to your recordist. Trust that you will still be getting your money's worth by allowing a brief down moment.

- ✓ Keep conversations in the control room to a minimum while work is going on. Talk quietly, if you talk at all. There's a common situation where the recordist keeps turning up the monitors, and the unrelated conversation on the couch gets louder as well. Don't make your engineer have to shut you up just to hear what the player in the other room is saying or to hear a mix.

- ✓ Respect personal space. Recordists need it as much as you do. Before two of you grab chairs and hem the engineer in at the console, ask if that is okay. It's probably not, as they need to access the patchbay, outboard gear, and live room. If they are taking a short food break, consider leaving them alone for a few minutes instead of loading them with your thoughts about the next round of overdubs. There will be a time for this.

- ✓ If you are setting up amps, drums, or other loud instruments, make sure to stop playing when the engineer is setting up mics for you. You don't want to blow their hearing out before you've recorded a note, and they shouldn't have to continuously ask for this courtesy. Even earplugs can only cancel so much sound.

- ✓ When you are in overdubbing stages, note that your musicians or band members are working one at a time, and taking long breaks while others record. The recordist is not getting these same breaks. Keep this in mind. Leave a little breathing room between personnel.

- ✓ If you have booked time based on recording six songs, don't show up day of with a new plan to record eleven songs. Your recordist has suggested the time booked based on your needs that you relayed at the initial booking. If you want to change the plans, communicate beforehand and be prepared that there might be a change in price or availability.

- ✓ If a session seems to be going well, don't automatically load the project with more work. "Great, we did the basic tracks faster than I expected. Let's record three extra songs!" Focus on the music you have agreed on recording. Sure, it might only theoretically take 5 minutes to lay down the basics for an extra song, but this usually takes more like an hour, and then you add in overdubs and mixing...

- ✓ Author/producer Jesse Cannon [*Tape Op* #97] mentions, "Don't swim out of your lane of expertise" in his new book (*Processing Creativity*, see review this issue). If you've hired someone based on their skills, don't start by questioning everything they are doing or asking them to work in a totally unfamiliar manner (unless they are down for it!). Use their skills; this is what you are paying for.

- ✓ Use general language and emotions to describe what you want. Someone recently said to me, "I want that part to be dramatic." I knew exactly what approach would work once I heard that. If they had said, "I want to add a plate reverb and EQ to this section," we would have had a less interesting result.

- ✓ If the session feels it's coming to a natural wrapping point, don't feel the need to pile on more work because "there's 15 more minutes on the clock." (It's amazing how a 4-minute handclap overdub turns into 45 minutes of work.) Your sessions probably need to be backed up, or tapes need to be put away. In addition, a quick verbal review of what's in store for the next session is always a good idea.

- ✓ Do you want rough mixes every day to hear the work in progress? If so, discuss with the recordist and budget time for this. Don't assume it magically happens.

- ✓ Please don't ask your recordist, "Do you know any labels?" or, "What do we do now?" once the recordings are complete. You've asked them to do your recording, and that is what they are focused on. If you don't have a manager or label, then these are your situations to figure out.

- ✓ Ask how your recordist wants their credits to read. Include these credits in any release, and spell them correctly. I cannot think of anything that makes us all happier.

In closing, remember that if you have chosen well, the person you are recording with will have your back. They will guide you through the process, keep goals in focus, and contribute ideas that help the music, without wasting your time and money. You want this person to feel treated respectfully, and you want them to be happy to record with you again. Situations that build resentment can happen far too easily in the recording studio. But when everyone on the "team" feels appreciated and respected, great things can happen. ☺

