

# A Detailed Guide to Getting the Most from your Studio Session

## Introduction

Recording is an odd process but one that's hard to get a lot of experience in. You usually have to pay to do it, so it's not like gigging where you can easily learn by doing. Many musicians find it more nerve-wracking than playing live.

It's doubly hard because, unlike a gig, you may have to live with the results for ages. It'll be your demo until you can afford to record the next one. It's amazingly easy to spend a fortune on recording and end up hating the results.

This section contains some hints on how to get the best from your session, including:

- Being in control
- Nerves
- Mistakes
- Recording sections of tracks
- How to explain your music

## Keep A Long View

It's easy to get bogged down in that mandolin part when it was only a little gimmick that you thought of in the pub.

Try and look beyond the part you're recording right now and keep an eye on how it fits into the big picture of the tune.

Keep in mind what it was you loved most about the song when you wrote it. They're probably the bits you want to come through clearest and to make sure are recorded best.

Remember you're making music here - it's easy to lose sight of the actual song with all the technology and nerves kicking around.

## Remember Who Is Paying

It's easy to be intimidated by engineers because you're in their environment. But remember that you're here to record your music the way you want it to sound.

Take advice but don't be bullied.

Some engineers can be a bit unhelpful or overbearing. Be especially cautious if they start giving you a load of techno-babble. It can be a smoke-screen to get out of something they can't be bothered with.

*"I have been guilty of doing that. Sometimes if it was getting late and I couldn't be arsed to do something, I'd make out that the 'overhanging underswingers' weren't aligned so I couldn't do it."*

**Ant Danbury - Studio Engineer**

*"I worked with an extremely talented singer-songwriter who had been forced to play along to a click-track in a previous session elsewhere. It had completely choked the life out of his songs but the engineer had bullied him into it because it made editing the recordings easier. Playing without a click produced far more musical results and because he felt more confident, his performance was much better too. If you're not happy with the way things are going, insist that they're changed."*

**Paul White - Editor, 'Sound on Sound'**

*"It's that British thing. Like in restaurants when the waiter comes up and says 'Everything okay?' and you say it is even when it's terrible. I've heard of people being in tears the day after a recording because they've accepted the engineer imposing his or her taste onto them."*

**Paul Burns - Studio 64, Middlesbrough**

## **Nerves**

"Red light fever" is a common condition in studios.

Taking a couple of minutes to get focussed and relaxed can save you loads of time in the long run. Although a bit of nerves can be helpful to keep the energy in your recording, if it's really not happening take a break.

Shake your shoulders around to diffuse tension or if you're really wired, go outside and jump around a bit.

Make it easy for the person actually being recorded by not having loads of people hanging around in the control room staring at them through the window.

*"At first I was nervous because you think there's so many people around you, and it's like 'Oh God, they're all watching me!' It does put you on edge a bit, but after a while you get used to it. If someone walks into the studio that you don't know, it kind of throws you and then you start to act all shy ... It's funny what nerves do. They can make you perform terribly."*

**1Xtra's KC on her early recording career**

*"It's the kind of thing that you can avoid if you've gone along to the studio beforehand and you've built a rapport with the engineer. It's easier to record with someone you don't think of as a stranger and that means you can relax and play your best. Remember that you're making music and it's supposed to be fun."*

**Paul Burns - Studio 64, Middlesbrough**

## **Starts and Ends**

Get used to playing the song without giving it your all. You might have to run through two or three times while the engineer get the settings right before you go for a take.

Hold back some energy for the runs that matter. Otherwise you'll end up tired and it'll show in the finished version.

It can help to trim the finished track if you don't do a complete count-in. Count "1-2-3" and then imagine the fourth beat. That way, you have a bit of silence before you start.

When you finish, keep still for a second. If you jump out of your chair and shout "YESSS!!!" before the last ringing notes or cymbals have died away, that'll pick up on the microphones. The only way to fix it is to do the take again.

*"People new to recording have a habit of starting a discussion on how well they played before the last note of the song has died away completely. Stay perfectly silent for at least ten seconds after you think the song has ended just to be safe..."*

**Paul White - Editor, 'Sound on Sound'**

## **Other Tips**

### **Go for a walk**

Being locked in a windowless room for a long period of time is enough to put the zap on anyone's

head. Getting out of the place and getting some fresh air and daylight will help you get balanced again. You'll also get away from the tune so you'll come back with a more objective view of how the music's going.

### ***Take along CDs***

If you've got a track in mind with the right drum sound, vocal sound or an overall feel that you're after, it'll help you explain to the engineer what you want. Just playing a tune can save an awful lot of hand waving and vague descriptions.

### ***Have your way***

If you just put up with something you don't like, it doesn't generally benefit anyone or save you time. That applies to everything from the mix in your headphones to the bass sound to the speed of the song.

This is your chance to show off your music in its best light so make sure you're comfortable with the sound and happy that the tune is going in the right direction.

### ***Worry about your bit***

All those knobs can be a bit overwhelming and it can be a bit intimidating if you have to keep stopping while someone messes around with microphone positions or mysterious things in the control room. That's the engineer's job and you need to let them get on and worry about technical stuff. Remember you're the performer and your job is to concentrate on playing your music well.

*"You need to have faith in your engineer. That's why it's so important to choose the right one to begin with."*

**Ant Danbury - Studio Engineer**