



### **Before booking your studio time.**

Work out how much you can afford to spend on your recording. Once you have your budget Alt-Mu can advise you on how many tracks you could realistically complete to a high standard. It is far better to record fewer tracks that are high quality than to rush through lots of tracks quickly. Make sure you and your tracks are ready; don't waste time and money trying to do things that could be done at home or your rehearsal space. The more organized you are entering the studio the more room you have to fine tune things like adding cool guitar textures or vocal harmonies.

### **Producer or engineer? Know the difference.**

Engineers help you to record by setting up mic's and physically performing the recording functions, they can also mix the audio and master your recording to a high standard. Engineers generally don't suggest any production ideas in a sense they are "recordists", you play they record and mix. Depending on your level of experience good results can be obtained with an engineer alone however often artists feel they need the trained help of a producer to build their sound.

A producer is closer to an additional band member with generally much higher experience than the band members (that's what they are paid for!). A producer can suggest harmonies, textures and even help when parts of an arrangement don't work so well. The level of influence you allow a producer to have is completely up to you, producers suggest ideas, and they don't force you to use them. Generally the support of a producer produces better results as artists find someone to "bounce" ideas off and someone who won't just say yeah that sounds great...

Costs of producers vary greatly between skill levels or reputation but generally they are a worthwhile investment.

### **Preparing for your session.**

If you plan to work with a producer try to discuss production ideas outside of the studio, make sure you are clear on what you want from your recording and that the producer understands. If possible let the producer have a rough copy of your songs or arrange for them to see a gig/rehearsal. If there is a particular style of production you aim to achieve it is a good idea to bring reference cds for the producer to listen to.

Be sure to change guitar strings and drum heads at least a day before your session, it's a good idea to bring some spares although they are available from the Alt-Mu shop. Make sure your equipment functions properly, ensure amp heads have been serviced, leads checked and once again it's always good to have a spare. If you are sequencing tracks or using beats have them on a CD or portable hard drive when you arrive. If you plan to play to a click track, try to figure out the correct BPM for the tempo in advance, this will save a little time in the studio, it is also advisable to practise playing to a click track in advance, if you find this difficult a producer can normally create a click track that's slightly easier to play to. Any inconsistencies in tempo are generally amplified in a studio environment however if you have time these can be corrected. Provide the engineer/producer with lyric sheets; this will be your mutual reference point to find start/stop point during performance/mix-down. Arrive at the session with a clear head and having had plenty of rest, recording can be physically demanding process, if you plan not to use the on-site catering facilities make sure you bring plenty of food and water.



### **During your session.**

Any studio is an expensive place to party, try to stay focused on what you want to achieve and refrain from drinking and other recreational activities. When you have finished your contribution to your project the artists lounge provides a great place to relax, play games or catch a movie. Try to tune up as often as possible preferably between every take. Whilst work is going on in the control room try to keep talking to a minimum to avoid distracting the engineer/producer. Take regular 5 minute breaks to rest your ears. If you're not actively involved pop to the artists lounge and let the active participants concentrate fully. If the entire band is to be present at mix-down appoint a spokesperson to be the liaison between the band and the engineer/producer. Work out your differences of opinion as a band and don't use the engineer/producer as a referee. Try to keep in mind the only reason you are having a disagreement is because you care about the recording. Listen to the overall balance of sounds and try to think of the song as a whole. Not every sound can be front and centre you should do what is best for the track not you as an individual. Finally relax and enjoy yourself, remember you are recording a vibe and mood not just the sounds.

### **The recording process.**

Where possible the drummer should arrive 2 hours before the rest of the band. This allows a decent amount of undivided one on one time between the drummer and the engineer/producer. If it is a live recording the rest of the band will set-up and sound check individually in an order set by the producer/engineer. Traditionally this would be drums, bass, guitars, keyboards then vocals. If you all arrive at the same time then try to allow the drummer two hours with the producer/engineer by relaxing in the artists lounge. You are nearly ready to record.

If the recording is to be recorded using overdubs, after the drummer has sound checked the rest of the band will set up in the control room and sound check ready to start recording guide tracks. During the process outlined above the engineer/producer will also set up a headphone mix for each individual musician. This is so you can hear each other clearly and also so you can hear how the engineer is hearing you. Individual headphone mixes are possible but you need to tell the engineer what you need, less bass etc... At this point if you are using a click track the engineer will set it up through the headphones. The engineer/producer will now ask you to play all together just to fine tune the levels and ensure everything is ready to start tracking. You are now ready to start recording takes.

### **The mixing process.**

Once you have finished recording all the parts required you have reached the mixing stage of the process. This is the point when all of the individual tracks are balanced, equalised and any effects such as reverb and delay are added. At this point the tracks become how they will sound as the finished product. It is normally advisable to mix on a separate day to recording.

Once each track is at a point that it is considered by everyone to be finished the engineer will bounce all the individual tracks down to a 2 tracks ready to be put on a master CD that can be played on a normal CD player. If required the engineer/producer will take the final 2 track mix and master it to ensure that it is at a suitable level and ready to be played on most stereo systems. Mastering is an art in itself and some studios specialise solely in this field. The recordings are now complete... well almost!



## What next?

It is recommended at this point that the CD is taken out of the studio and played on as many different stereos as possible, from your car to a crappy boom box, anything you can find. This is to ensure that your music sounds great wherever and on whatever system it gets played on. If anything needs correcting at this point you may want to return to the studio and spend a couple of hours getting things as you like them. Congratulations you have reached the end of your recording.

## Studio terminology.

- **LIVE RECORDING** - This is when the band are recorded playing together similar to a rehearsal or live performance situation. It is possible to overdub extra parts on to the recording after you have completed your live takes.
- **OVERDUBS** - This is when the band are recorded individually one after the other.
- **CLICK TRACK** - This is a metronome type sound that the performers will hear through their headphones that keeps the song at a constant tempo. Using a click track can greatly help at mix down as time based effects can be used quicker
- and cut and paste techniques can be used to replaced flaws in the recording.
- **GUIDE TRACK** - This is a rough recording of a part made early on in the session that gives the band a guide to play along to during an overdub recording situation.