

Record Production for Artists 101

By Josh Goldberg from Koshers Style Records

Contact: josh@joshgoldbergmusic.com

Hear production samples at www.koshersstylerecords.com

If you want to go from being a Songleader to a recording artist, you'll need two things: great original songs, and great recordings. Recording a single, EP, or full-length album can seem like a daunting process, especially if you have never done it before, but this class will give you a bird's eye view of what to expect during the recording process including pre-production, production, post-production, and what to do after your record is done! Your recordings are your calling card as an artist, so you want to make sure that the time, money, and energy you put into creating them will give you a product that you will be proud of for many years to come!

Glossary of terms and personnel you will need to know. These terms and definitions are specific to the context of record production.

Some of these may seem obvious, but there are some distinctions that you may not know.

Song: The melody, chords, and lyrics for any particular piece. (This may be written down or notated on a piece of paper.).

Record: The sound recording of one song.

Album: A collection of records.

Single: One recorded song released on its own OR it can be one song selected from a longer album that is going to be promoted the most or anticipated to be the most popular.

EP: Stands for Extended Play. This term originally was meant to describe the length of a vinyl record, but now just means a short album with around 3-6 Tracks

LP: Stands Long Play or (Full) Length Play. This is a full length album, usually 7-12 songs.

Artist: The person who is singing all of (or the majority of) the songs on the album.

Songwriter: The person who writes a song/songs on an album.

Producer: The person who helps guide the artist, musicians, and engineers working on the project to get the desired result. The producer helps the artist achieve their musical vision, and often acts as a coach, arranger, sometimes co-writer, musician, programmer, music director, makes most of the creative choices, and shapes the overall artistic direction of the project. (Different producers have different skill sets, and it's important to know what skill set your desired producer has.)

Engineer: The person who sets up and operates all the recording equipment, and often does most of the editing of the audio before it's sent to the mixer.

Mix Engineer: The person who takes all of the different audio tracks (which sometimes may be hundreds) and balances them out so that all of them are heard at the proper volume, and adds other effects (such as EQ, compression, reverb, delay, and panning) to make the song sound cohesive. The mixer engineer then gives their final product as one .wav file (high quality audio file) to the mastering engineer.

Mastering Engineer: This person takes the mixed .wav file, and shapes the overall track, making sure that it sounds polished, the dynamics are balanced, and primes it to be played on radio or streaming services. If there are multiple songs on the album, the mastering engineer makes sure the volume and dynamics are consistent on all songs on the project, creating a smooth listening experience.

Studio Musician: A highly trained musician hired by the artist/producer to play on a record. These musicians are used to playing in a studio setting, and can usually sight read sheet music very well, performing songs they've never heard or played before with precision, accuracy, and good feel.

Note: Traditionally, all of these roles were filled by different people, but today it's common that one person can full more than one of these roles. For example your producer might also engineer, and be a studio musician. Or the studio musician might also be a mix engineer.

Track: All the audio from one microphone instrument.

Take: One performance of a song or a section of a song.

Comping: This is the process of compiling many different takes from a vocalist or instrument, finding the best takes of each section of the song, and combining them together to give the illusion of one continuous performance.

Digital Audio Workstation (DAW): Software used for recording and editing audio. Popular DAW's used today include Pro Tools, Logic, Ableton, Cubase, Digital Performer, and Garageband.

MIDI: stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. This is musical data that can be used and manipulated to create a variety of sounds. Typically a keyboardist will record using a MIDI keyboard, and this can be used to trigger different sounds from the DAW.

Outboard Gear: Mechanical devices used to record and/or add effects to audio. These are usually very expensive ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars for each piece of hardware. Can include Preamps, compressors, EQ's, Reverb units and more.

Plugin: A piece of software within a DAW that emulates effects made by various pieces of hardware.

Interface: A device that converts an audio signal into 1's and 0's that the DAW can process.

So, you wanna make a record?

Here are some things to consider:

- What are your goals for the project?
 - Jewish or secular? Or a mixture?
 - Who is my intended audience?
 - What do I want to showcase? Songwriting, vocal, and/or instrumental chops? Singable melodies for camps/songleaders? How many songs do I want to record?
 - Single, EP, LP
- What is my total budget?
 - Sample Budgets attached
 - Self funding?
 - Crowdfunding?
 - Bank of mom and dad?
 - Loan?
- Where will I record?
 - In your own city?
 - In a major music city such as Los Angeles, New York, or Nashville?
 - In my own home studio, in someone else's home studio, or in a commercial studio? Or a combination of these 3?
- Who will be my producer?
 - What producer would fit my style of music?
 - If it's Jewish music, does he/she have expertise in recording Jewish music?
 - What skill set does the producer have? Engineering? Mixing? Songwriting? Arranging? Vocal coaching? Programming? Sampling? Do they play any instruments? Sing background vocals? Connections to great musicians? Did they start as an artist? Start as a musician? Start as an engineer? Start as a DJ? Not necessary that they have all of these skills, but good to know what they do have.

- Do they have their own studio, or would you need to rent one?
- What else has this person produced? (If you don't know, ask for samples!)
- Have any of the artists they have produced had commercial success?
- Can you talk to any artists who have worked with them and get their thoughts on how their experience working with this person was?
- How much will this person charge?

Note: If a project is extremely low budget, some people may choose to either:

- A)** Act as their own producer (i.e. making all the creative decisions), and use engineers to help with tracking, mixing, mastering.
- B)** Completely produce, engineer, mix everything themselves. (If you're not an experienced artist/engineer/producer, this can be extremely difficult, and I would not recommend if this is project is something you would like to reach a lot of people. However, if you're doing it as a learning experiment, I do highly encourage it, and it's a great way to learn!)
- C)** Have a co-producer. This may be a good option for an experienced artist who has a solid vision of their project and how to achieve it, and just wants a producer to give input on certain aspects or on certain songs.

STAGES OF ALBUM PRODUCTION:

Once you've answered most of the questions above, i.e. figured out what the scope of your project is going to be, determined your budget and secured your funding, and found your producer, you're ready to dive in! Every producer is different, and every album is different, but this is a general boilerplate example of how I typically approach the production process with a client.

Stage 1: Pre Production:

- Artist compiles a list of all songs that could potentially go on the project. (Ideally way more songs than will actually be recorded)

- Artist makes lyric/chord sheets, and basic voice memo recordings of songs to give to producer
- Producer helps artist narrow down the songs that would be the best fit for the project.
- Once songs are determined, artist and producer meet, and go through each song together in detail. Producer may make suggestions on song format/structure, lyrics, chords, melody, etc to make song as “rock solid” as possible.
- Artist and producer make a “scratch track” (meaning a placeholder track that will eventually be replaced with the final performance) with vocal/ piano and vocal to a click track, reflecting all new updates to the song.
- Artist and producer discuss instrumentation ideas, meaning what instruments will be used on each song, and what kind of classification of each instrument. For example:
 - Keyboards
 - Piano? Rhodes? Wurlitzer? Organ? Synth pads/leads
 - Acoustic instruments or midi keyboards?
 - Guitars
 - Acoustic Steel String: 6 or 12 String?
 - Nylon String
 - Electric Guitar
 - tones: clean, distorted, delayed, swells, melodic lines vs. chordal accompaniment, solos?
 - Bass:
 - Electric, upright, synth bass
 - Drums
 - Acoustic Drum kit (note, drums are notoriously the hardest thing to record on a technical level, so if anything is going to be recorded in a big/commercial studio, it will probably be drums)
 - Programed/synthesized drums (this is a mostly what you hear on top 40 radio and in electronic music these days)
 - Auxiliary percussion?
 - shakers, djembe, cajon, tambourine, world percussion
 - Strings
 - Single string player (Violin, viola, or cello)
 - Single string player stacked
 - String quartet (Violin I, Violin II, viola, cello)

- Orchestra (this would require a big budget, although there are companies in Europe that will record your orchestra remotely for cheaper than you would think)
- Combine 1 or two live string players with programmed strings
- Background vocals
 - Sing your own backgrounds
 - Hire background singer
 - Background singers stacks multiple parts
 - Hire multiple singers
 - Hire choir (\$\$\$)
- Create a detailed budget, so you know exactly where every dollar of your total budget will go. Here is an example:

	B	C	D	E
Preliminary Budget for 10 Song LP				
Item		Number of Units	Price per Unit	Total
<i>Production Fee</i>		10	500	5000
<i>Studio Day</i>		5	300	1500
<i>Mixes</i>		10	350	3500
<i>Mastering</i>		10	75	750
<i>Musicians (3 players per song)</i>		10	300	3000
<i>Video</i>		1	1000	1000
<i>Photography</i>		1	300	300
<i>CD's</i>		500	2	1000
<i>Graphic Design</i>		1	400	400
				16450

- Once the instrumentation is decided, the producer might develop the scratch tracks, creating a “track bed” using midi or sampled instruments to create a “mock up” some of which will eventually be replaced with other musicians

- Once the track bed is ready, the producer would make musical notation (also known as charts) for the musicians. (Hint, the more detailed the charts, are more efficient the recording process will be.)

Stage 2: Production

- Musicians record over track beds in a process called Overdubbing. In some cases multiple musicians may record at once, or each musician might record at different times, and the tracks are all added together.
- In some cases all the musicians will record in the same studio. However, often different instruments are recorded in different studios, and sometimes some of the musicians will record themselves remotely often from a different part of the world!
- Typically, all instruments will be recorded to a “click track” or a metronome, so the musicians know exactly what beats to play on so everything is in sync.
- Throughout the process the producer and the artist give feedback to the musicians to get the desired performances to bring out the qualities you want in the music.
- If “scratch vocals” were recorded during pre-production this is when the final vocal would be recorded. Often the artist will do multiple takes (anywhere from 2-10) of each song, sometimes breaking them down into smaller sections. The many vocal takes will later be compiled (or “comped”) into a complete, seamless vocal performance. This can also be done with instruments.
- Again, the more prep work you do in Pre Production (stage one) will mean that the production stage will go more smoothly!

Stage 3: Post Production

Post production is everything that happens in between recording the audio and having a finished product.

- First this starts with editing the audio. This can include comping, vocal tuning, quantizing (making instruments that are not on the beat fall perfectly in time) rearranging pieces of audio, and anything else that involves manipulating the audio in a significant way.
- Once this is done, the producer or engineer (if they are not doing the mixing themselves) will create “stems” (separate audio files) of each

individual track, with all the edits that have been made, to the mix engineer.

- The mix engineer takes all the audio files for each song, and “mixes” them all together, making sure all the instruments are balanced at the right volume and tonality. They may also add time based effects such as reverb, chorus, and delay, as well as Equalization (EQ), panning, compression, and others.
- Once the mixer has an initial draft of the “mixdown” (audio file with all the stems combined together after the mixing has applied the effects above) they will deliver it to the artist producer.
- There may be several revisions, when the artist/producer gives the mixer feedback on changes they want to have made.
- When the final mix down is complete, producer will provide mix down to the mastering engineer.
- Mastering engineer takes mixdowns, for all songs on the project, applying effects to the overall tracks to make sure volume and dynamics of each track are consistent throughout the album, and are at levels comparable to other songs one might here on the radio (often the mastering engineer will use “reference tracks” as a way to compare their master with other popular songs)
- Once masters are complete, YOU HAVE A RECORD!

Stage 4: Release

- Typically, this stage is beyond the scope of your producer’s responsibility. You may choose to move forward on your own, or you may want to hire administrative/marketing/PR to help you with the stems of album release.
- Choose a Digital music distributor
 - Today, anyone can get their music into online music stores/streaming services using Digital distributors such as tunecore, distrokid, CD baby, etc. Do your research and find out which service fits your needs.
 - If you choose to make physical CD’s (this is up to you to decide if it’s worth it to you do to, since CD’s are quickly becoming obsolete) you may want to use a disc manufacturing company such Discmakers. They will burn the CD’s for you (typically you will have to order in large quantities, 500 or more) create the packaging, and deliver them to your door. Note, this can be expensive.

- Disc-makers does have in house graphic designers who can help you design the images and text in your packaging, or you can hire your own graphic designer.
- You may want to hire photographers for promotional pictures
- **I highly suggest creating video content for as many of the songs on your album as you can afford to!!** This is a multi-media age, and you will reach a wider audience with video than with audio alone.

Closing thoughts:

There is no one way to make a record! Ultimately, this is your artistic expression, and it will be unique to you! Everything we have talked about to day is just from my experiences as a producer and artist, but every project is different.

Remember, that when you hire a producer to produce the album, **YOU ARE THE BOSS!** It is the producer's job to help you achieve **YOUR ARTISTIC VISION**, not the other way around! Of course, if you hire a producer, it should be someone whose opinion you value and trust, and you should be open to their suggestions and at least give their ideas a try. But at the end of the day, they answer to you, and they **WANT** you to be happy with the product, so that you will recommend them to all your friends! And your producer should be interested in your success. The more successful your project is, the more it will help both of your careers. It's a win-win!

Yes, producing an album can take a lot of money, time, energy and effort. Ultimately, it is unlikely that you will recoup all of your financial costs of production by selling your CD/streaming your music. But if you want to have a career as a recording/touring artist, having high quality recorded music will be the building block for your career. Authors write books, chefs cook delicious food, and songwriters make albums! It is a labor of love, and I guarantee you will reap what you sow in terms of passion, joy, and love with your music. There has never been and never will be another artist just like you, so get your message out into the world and share it! The world needs to hear your music!

Please feel free to reach out to me any time if you have any questions or just want to chat.

Sincerely,

Josh Goldberg

josh@joshgoldbergmusic.com

kosherstylerecords.com

joshgoldbergmusic.com

Further Reading and resources:

How to Make it in the New Music Business by Ari Herstand

-Great book with ideas about promotion, creating a music career as an independent musician in today's climate.

For those wanting to get started with recording demo's at home but don't have any recording gear yet, check out these videos:

Studio Setup for the Beginning Music Producer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yo0FMWHTjfA>

Studio Setup for the Intermediate Music Producer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTZYcMOYkdE>

Music Production and DAW Tutorials:

[lynda.com](https://www.lynda.com)

<https://online.berklee.edu/>

And of course, YOUTUBE! You can learn just about anything from youtube tutorials now.

Artscroll Interlinear Siddur (If you are recording music in Hebrew and are not fluent in the language, I recommend this so you can understand each and every word you are singing, so you can sing each word with conviction and intention!)

Live Music Method: All Roads Lead to the Stage by Tom Jackson

-Great book for any performer

<https://singonevoice.com/>

(If you're looking for excellent and affordable vocal instruction, I highly recommend this vocal studio, and they teach via skype, so you can study from anywhere! As vocal artists, we always have to keep working on our instrument!)

**And of course...SONGLEADER BOOT CAMP!!!!
'nuff said. :)**