

Freshly  
updated for  
2023!

# THE MUSICIANS ATLAS GETTING AROUND THE WORLD OF MUSIC

*Tees Music Alliance*  
developing. promoting. enriching.

# HELLO THERE...

It's an understatement to say how well the first edition of our Musician's Atlas was received – copies have been flying out and thanks to the good folks at Key Fund and National Lottery Community Fund, we're able to update and release this new version.

Our Atlas is intended to inspire and motivate – it's not meant to be a rule book – it's there to be used as a reference tool; and to get your cogs whirring as you use it to map out your own individual journey through the music industry.

Some of the best music business minds in the North East have contributed to this guide – giving some great advice and information on the wide range of subject areas that have become essential to you making your mark with your original music.

We've presented everything in an easy to follow format, using bullet points and without jargon. In addition to the advice offered, we've got some inspirational stories from working artists, offering their experience on how things happened for them.

Making music today in our post-pandemic, financially challenged times is tough. Established artists are still able to command huge ticket prices, but those at the grassroots find it harder for

promoters and venues to take a risk on them. We need to find new, collaborative ways of working to push our home-grown artists further up the ladder towards success – whilst at the same time maintaining good levels of well-being.

Tees Music Alliance is a charitable social enterprise; set up specifically to support our local music scene, so this guide is a great example of how we work with local practitioners to pull together and make a difference.

We'll be using this guide as a starting point to inspire future discussions, panels, conferences and presentations – looking more deeply into each subject area with the help of those 'in the know'.

We hope it helps you to keep your music aspirations on track; and reassures you that your talents and commitment to music are valued. We hope that the advice in this guide helps to keep you enthused, inspired and ready for action.

Take care and stay well.

**Paul Burns**  
**CEO Tees Music Alliance**  
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# CONTENTS

## 4 JARGON BUSTER

WTF?! All those pesky acronyms explained

**6 PLAYING LIVE** Approaching rehearsals, how to get gigs, promoter checklist and gig etiquette

**8 PROMOTION** Andy Carr from The Kids Are Solid Gold gives advice on gig promotion

**10 TOURING** Joe Bell from Avalanche Party talks about life in a touring band

**12 RUNNING A DIY GIG** Hana Harrison from Art Mouse delves into the world of DIY gig promotion

**14 DOING IT YOURSELF** Stress-free gig promotion

**15 INSIDE VIEW** Kingsley Hall from Teesside rabble-rousers Benefits

**16 PROMOTION** Best practice, image, radio and the view on employing professionals

**18 PRESS** Claire Dupree from NARC. magazine gives some insight into getting the most out of your marketing

**20 PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOS** Amelia Read offers tips on promo photos and music videos

**22 RADIO** BBC Tees Introducing presenter Shakk advises on getting radio airplay

**23 SOCIAL MEDIA HEALTH CHECK** How to make it work for you

**24 RELEASE STRATEGY** Follow this simple tool to strategise your next release

**26 RECORDING** Musician and producer Rob Irish provides some tips on working in a studio versus recording at home

**28 PRODUCTION** Producer Paddy Jordan advises how to get the most out of working with a producer

**30 MANAGEMENT** Bradley Kulisic explains the role of a manager

**32 INSIDE VIEW** Jon Horner from Teesside orch-folk group Nel Unlit

**33 LABELS, DISTRIBUTION & PUBLISHING** Find out more about the role of labels, distributors, publishers and sync

**34 LABELS** Stephen Gill from Teesside-based Butterfly Effect Records explains the role of micro labels

**36 STREAMING** Music manager, mentor and consultant Henry Carden demystifies the worlds of streaming, playlists and social media

**38 PUBLISHING** Wipe Out Music's John Esplen gives some insight into the role of a publisher

**40 INSIDE VIEW** Jamie Donnelly from Middlesbrough disco punk band Be Quiet. Shout Loud!

**41 INSIDE VIEW** Venus Grrrls, punchy alt. rock band with an activist focus on promoting participation, acknowledgement and respect of women in the music industry

**42 MONEY MATTERS** Understanding royalties, record and publishing deals, legal issues and funding

**43 INSIDE VIEW** Vicky Wright from Tees-based rock band Salsola

**44 HEALTH & WELLBEING** Tips on how to look after yourself, body and mind

**46 FURTHER HELP & ADVICE** Handy websites, local music charities and more



# JARGON BUSTER

Sometimes the music industry can seem a bit impenetrable, and technical jargon and acronyms are commonplace. We might use some of these during the course of this guide, and you'll no doubt come across others in the course of your career. Here, we list a few common terms to help you find your way.

## PA – Public Address system

Comprising of microphones, mixers, front of house speakers and monitors. When a PA is 'in-house' it's permanently located within the venue. When hiring a PA, be sure to understand exactly what will be provided.

## Backline

Traditionally backline is what you see at the back of the stage, ie. guitar amps, bass cabs, drum kits (not including breakables, which are things like cymbals, snare, stands and kick pedals). Usually the headliner of a show will be the ones to provide the backline for a gig or a tour, you should ask in advance if this is the case. For festivals/all-dayers a backline will usually be provided but make sure to ask what is available.

## Soundcheck

Typically, a band would play through a couple of songs to check levels from the front of house and onstage. A soundcheck includes a line check too.

## Line Check

As opposed to a normal extensive soundcheck, a line check tests each channel/instrument is feeding into the desk. Usually used at festivals or all-dayers when there's not enough time for a soundcheck for all artists on the line-up.

## Tech Spec

This is a document you should send in advance of the gig which will let the sound engineer know what your set-up on stage is, it can be a simple list of microphones and instruments on stage or you can add extra info on how an instrument should sit in the mix or how each

band member likes their monitor mix. Please remember that this should be chatted about in advance as smaller venues may not be able to accommodate everything.

## Stage Plan

A visual representation of how you line up on stage. Imagine if someone took a picture of you from above the stage and how that would look; it helps sound engineers to know where the bass or keys go on a stage so they can plan where to set up stands and leads.

## Booking Agent

The person that arranges the band's live performance. Books the shows, negotiates fees and accommodation and works closely with the band, management and promoters.

## Rider

A hospitality rider consists of food and drink provided by a promoter for performers. A tech rider is the list of equipment an artist requires in order to perform their set (see Tech Spec/ Stage Plan).

## Biography/Press Release

A biography is a kind of potted history of a band or artist's musical career, often including previous work, notable projects and achievements. If you're a brand new artist or band, a biography may not be a priority, but a press release is always useful.

A press release is much more immediate; it should explain what you're currently doing – whether that's releasing a single, album or touring. A good press release should be succinct and descriptive, explaining what you're doing, when and why. Try your best to

describe the music, include some information on themes or subjects your music tackles, and always remember to include links to your music and social media pages. You could also talk about live shows and include quotes from previous bits of positive press or airplay you've received.

Confusingly, sometimes a press release will be referred to as a 'PR', which is not to be confused with a public relations person who will act on your behalf to promote your work for a fee (see Publicist/PR/Plugger).

## Hi-res Images

Hi-res stands for high resolution; any press images you take should be at least 300dpi (dots per inch) so they're useable for print publications. Professional photographers will always supply hi-res versions. If you're taking images yourself make sure you check your camera or phone's settings.

## EPK – Electronic Press Kit

A packaged set of promotional materials hosted online. A kind of one-stop shop where all your promotional material is collated for journalists to access. Dropbox is a useful platform for hosting an EPK; upload the information you want to share – including hi-res images, press release, MP3s, video files etc. – and make the folder accessible to anyone with a shared link. Also useful for technical information for gigs and tours.

## Publicist/PR/Plugger

In much the same way an agent will work on your behalf to secure you gigs or tours, a publicist (or PR) will do the same for media, attempting to gain you interviews, reviews and features in magazines, newspapers and online. A plugger will do the same job for radio, promoting their clients' music to international, national and internet radio stations. Both PRs and pluggers can be expensive to hire, as they

will have knowledge and relationships which are difficult to build on a DIY level.

## DAW – Digital Audio Workstation

Software that is used to record music.

## Four-track

A recording device with only four tracks or channels, as opposed to DAWs which have basically unlimited tracks or channels. (See also, 8-Track, 16-Track, 24-Track etc...)

## Sync – Synchronisation

In the music industry, sync means having your music used in visual mediums; these could include advertising, gaming, in feature films or documentaries, TV shows, library music or trailers. Sync licences are administered by publishing companies – see page 38 for more information.

## Music Supervisor

A person who organises music for a TV programme or film. Music Supervisors will be listed on the end credits of a programme, give their name/the TV show a quick Google and you (potentially!) have a direct line to the person who makes the decisions!

## Distribution

Getting the music into the public's hands and ears; this can mean online streaming services, or pressing physical copies on vinyl, CD or tape and sending them to record shops. Digital distributors (also known as aggregators) broker deals between the artist and streaming platforms; there's no need to 'sign' to this kind of distributor, it's simply a service offered – see page 33 for more information.

## DSP – Digital Service Provider

Basically a platform where we find and listen to music.

# PLAYING LIVE

Nothing beats performing live to a crowd of happy fans, but the route to successful gigs isn't always easy. Here, we offer a few tips on how to get the best out of rehearsals, best practice when interacting with promoters and good gig etiquette.

## REHEARSING

Before you set foot on a stage, make sure you're well rehearsed! Depending on what you're using the rehearsal for, it may be best to take all your own equipment and instruments so you can get a feel for what you actually sound like at gigs.

Rehearsal rooms are good for 'band discipline', using them teaches you not to waste time; you can concentrate on what you're doing, and they also bring you into contact with other bands, promoters and useful people to know.

Make sure you're comfortable in the space you're rehearsing in so you can get the best out of your performance. The same rule applies for choosing a recording studio.

When you're rehearsing, try recording your set, even if it's just on your phone. It'll help you to discover how you sound and if there's any bits that need further rehearsal, this is great for timing your set too so you can make sure your set doesn't run over time.

Set up in the rehearsal room as if it was a gig and you were playing for an audience, if you've spent the whole rehearsal time facing each other, it can be a bit off putting when everyone's suddenly moved and has their back to you.

## GETTING GIGS

Be honest with yourself about whether you're ready to perform to an audience.

Be as good as you can be and **don't be put off by rejection**. Stay positive.

**Connect with people.** Go to gigs, talk to bands, find out where you fit in the local scene. Talk to the promoter, the sound engineer and the lighting engineer. Networking is crucial. Be proactive, don't wait for things to come to you.

Get to know which promoters tend to put on bands that you like. **Research promoters** online or by talking to friends. Make sure you're approaching promoters as they like to be approached – don't bombard them on social media.

**Be careful of playing too many local shows.** You want it to be a big event when you play.

**Try gig swaps** – put on your mates' band in your town and then they put yours on in theirs. This is a winning situation for everyone.

**Don't pay to join line-ups**, and be wary of promoters who only offer a fee based on your own ticket sales. Unless you've got a dedicated fan base ready to buy from you, this arrangement rarely works out in your favour.

If you're planning on playing abroad, **stay clued up on current regulations** (as things are always changing), the Musicians Union website has some good resources.

If you're playing a few shows at a time, or going on tour, make sure you **look after yourself** – eat well, sleep, don't drink too much alcohol and don't take drugs. Get some more tips in the Health & Wellbeing section.

# IT'S SHOW TIME! PRE-GIG CHECKLIST

Some of the most important work comes before the gig even starts... Here are a few top tips for promoters and bands running their own shows.

### Pre-announcing the show

Hold the date at the venue. Agree the deal with the band or agent.

### Announce the show

Set up on ticket sites and social media. Circulate press release and promo material to regional press ahead of announcement date. Announce show and get tickets on sale.

### Promote the show

Organise social media, send details out via mailing list. Tell press and radio. Adapt the promo plan as necessary. Agree support(s) with agent or headliner.

### Advance the show

Pay the deposit to agent of headline artist.

Get key information out to the tour manager and support acts, venue and technical teams. Confirm the rider requirements.

### Run the show

Arrival at venue – meet and greet, make introductions with technical and venue teams. Buy the rider. Manage soundchecks. Open the doors and meet and greet customers. Ensure show runs to time on the night. Organise the artist settlement with tour manager.

### Post-show

Get a copy of settlement (showing all event-related revenue and expenses) to agent and send any feedback to agent. Say thanks to artists. Pick up any post-show matters (lost property, etc).

## GIG ETIQUETTE

### DON'T...

- Play another local gig shortly before or after
- Be late, rude or unprofessional
- Overrun your soundcheck time
- Get drunk before or during the show
- Talk through other bands' sets
- Leave early and take your mates with you

### DO...

- Make sure the sound engineer has your tech spec in advance
- Promote the show
- Communicate with the promoter properly and know what equipment you need to take. Have as many spares as possible
- Get a good relationship going with the sound engineer
- Respect other bands on the line-up and watch their sets
- Say thank you



# PROMOTER: ANDY CARR, THE KIDS ARE SOLID GOLD

Andy Carr is one half of Teesside-based independent promoters The Kids Are Solid Gold. Preferring the left-field and usually ahead of the curve, they've brought such artists as Edwyn Collins, Glasvegas, Ezra Furman, Billy Bragg, DMA's, The Go! Team, Girl Ray, and many others to the region. They also run regular festivals including Songs From Northern Britain and Twisterella.

[www.thekidsaresolidgold.co.uk](http://www.thekidsaresolidgold.co.uk)

## As a promoter, what do you look for in a band?

I only really book acts that I'm into and would want to see myself. I think it's important when you're promoting a show that people see that you're passionate about the acts that you're promoting and I would find that difficult for anyone I wasn't too keen on. Quite often I like to use the festival slots to help build an act towards a headline show. That way the band and audience grow together and it's a great feeling when they are on the move as one. As far as local and regional supports go, then for me, the integrity of any bill is the most important factor. You always want to be as supportive as possible to the local and regional acts but first and foremost they have to be a good fit for the show. We get some really great intro emails from local and regional acts, and where that's the case we're always keen to support them if we can.

## What advice would you give musicians when it comes to approaching promoters for gigs?

An email which is personalised is always best. If there's an accompanying one sheet (bio or press release) plus a link to some tracks then that's also good. With that there's enough to get a feel for the act and what they are about. I would suggest avoiding sending round robin type emails which are just general and not tailored to suit the recipient. Emails like that just tend to get ignored I'm afraid. The personal touch is always best. Also, acts should do a

bit of research first and make sure that they are approaching the right kind of promoter for their type of music. If all else fails though then I'd always encourage acts to have a go themselves and put on their own show. The venues will always be super-supportive with this and it can be a really great way to kick things off.

## What do you think makes a great gig?

Putting the right act on in the right venue is always a good start. That might seem a strange thing to say but it's important to get that right. It's always a great help when there's some positive national and regional promo to shout about, that way there's a lot of stuff to share on socials without the promo appearing to be too contrived. As far as local and regional acts go, you want to see them taking some ownership in the build-up to the date, just through sharing social media posts. It's our job to promote the show but it really helps when everyone is on the same page, after all, it's in everyone's interests to make it a well-attended show. After that, it's down to the acts on the night. If you have a great venue technical team and you look after the acts, then all of the component parts are there for everyone to have a great time. Even things such as welcoming people when they arrive at the venue and having a banging playlist are all important and add to the general feel of the evening. If you get all of these right then it should hopefully be a cracking night.



## What makes a great promoter from a musician's perspective?

Personally, I'm always looking to see how I can support acts and bring them on in the region. In that respect, I think it's important to always have a longer-term plan and consider what the next show will look like for them. With the greatest will in the world, you can't do that for everyone, and I have to be selective but, if I'm promoting an act whether it be an international, national, regional or local one, I want to know that I have done my best for them and that we can move things on again next time we are working together. It's a lovely thing when that sentiment is reciprocated and it's a great feeling when the acts kick on and achieve success.

## When it comes to gig etiquette, do you have any 'dos and don'ts'?

Arrive in good time. Be respectful of the times for soundcheck and stage times. Be super-

easy to work with. Stay and support the other acts – you'll be surprised that some acts just play and then go. You won't then be surprised to know that we don't then ask them back. Also, work to bring a few family or friends to the show – you never know who will be watching you. Don't overdo it by playing a free show a week or so before that all-important support slot. It's important to respect the show that you've been given. If you do your best with it and bring a few heads then you're probably going to be invited back. Finally, just make sure you enjoy yourself!

## What do you expect bands to do in advance of a gig?

Just chip in with the promo – many hands make light work, etc. Also, don't overbook yourselves, no matter how tempting. Give it at least two weeks either before or after the date before you book in another adjacent local show, and just be good communicators from start to finish. Between us all we can make it a great show.





Image by Jason Ferdinando

# LIFE AS A TOURING BAND: AVALANCHE PARTY

Avalanche Party are a rock and roll band from the North Yorkshire Moors who have had considerable success touring, both in the UK and abroad. Here, bassist Joe Bell talks about what life is like for a band on the road.

[www.avalancheparty.bandcamp.com](http://www.avalancheparty.bandcamp.com)

## What are the best things about touring?

The main craic for me personally is getting the opportunity to play and visit places I'd otherwise never get the chance to experience. Belgrade, deepest Bavaria, Los Angeles, Tijuana, Dundee... the list could go on.

Through touring we have met some mint people dotted all over the gaffe and played with some great bands I wouldn't have heard of otherwise. Our last European tour went from Belgium all the way down to Serbia and back

again, playing every kind of gig or venue you can imagine, it was absolutely amazing. We've played gigs in America and Mexico too. We're from the middle of nowhere in the North East of England. So to experience these new places will always be class to me.

## And how about the downsides? What don't you enjoy?

Travelling 4+ hours to play for a rubbish promoter/agent that is literally a promoter/

agent by title, working with a sound engineer that doesn't care, with a support band doing 30 minutes of Wonderwall who will ruin your gear, in an empty venue, will always verge on the least enjoyable side.

## For musicians looking to gig outside their local area, what should be the first thing they take into consideration?

The main thing for us was – is it worth it? When you're a new band starting out there is always an element of playing as much as you can, everywhere you can, to get tighter and better. That being said, we would always try to do our homework on any offer that came in. Does the promoter have a good rep? Are the bands we'll be playing with local or are they all out of town also? If they're all out of town is it part of a gig/club night that has a good following? Is it feasible for us to travel to Southampton to do a gig? Expenses can rack up pretty quickly and if you're skint like we are it is stuff you need to take into consideration.

## Logistically, what sort of thing should musicians be considering when it comes to arranging a tour themselves?

If you are all working jobs make sure you're all definitely available for the period you're planning a tour. Planning a route that makes sense is important to keep fuel overheads down. Playing a gig in Brighton and then heading up to Glasgow, then back to Birmingham for the next gig costs a lot of money.

Another aspect of touring is having places to stop over. Have you got mates in the places you're playing that you could stop with, or mates of mates? Does the promoter, or other bands, know of a floor you can kip on? Avoiding hotels as much you can keeps costs down massively. Even if they're the cheapest of the cheap. Naturally sometimes it

is unavoidable, work within your own means. Same goes for van hire. When we first started touring we were normally a support band and that usually meant we weren't using our own amps. This meant we could usually squeeze into a car, maybe two. Communicate prior to the gig with the bands on the bill and see if you can use their equipment. Being super sound, respectful and getting a couple of beers in usually works. Don't be a prize doyle when using other bands' equipment. Fees when you first start touring are usually pretty crap so do everything you can to minimise any overheads. Also letting a promoter/sound engineer know what your band's tech spec is prior to the gig usually helps things on the night.

## What is the role of a tour manager, and why might you need/want one?

A tour manager essentially can sort all the logistics. Planning journeys, hotels, communicating with the promoter or venue etc. We work with a couple of TMs and they have their own van so can drive you around too. If you get a TM that can also do your sound for you too that is even better. Two birds, one net. If these guys are pro, and not just a helpful mate, they're earning a living and need paying – bear that in mind and really think on if your band that's six months old and has only played the Mucky Duck needs a TM right now... When starting out I'd absolutely recommend doing as much as you can yourselves, for as long as possible. If you're able to do things for yourselves it benefits in the long run. You can come across people in all walks of the industry that might just be ripping you off, or are just plain awful. If and when you feel it is needed to employ someone to help you out, being experienced in organising stuff will aid you keeping them filthy mitts at bay/keeping hold of the good guys.



# RUNNING A DIY GIG: HANA HARRISON, ART MOUSE

Hana Harrison is the booker at Art Mouse Promotions, a DIY promo company based on Teesside who put on lovely little gigs along with the odd cinema night, market and various workshops.

[www.facebook.com/artmousepromotions](https://www.facebook.com/artmousepromotions)

## What does the term 'DIY gig' mean to you?

I suppose the term DIY gig means a slightly different thing to me as a promoter as it would to a band, but I try to approach things in quite a similar way. We don't have big budgets for our shows and we literally do everything ourselves from designing posters, decorating venues, picking bands, running around making sure they're OK and they go on stage on time etc. There is no big team of staff or designated jobs, the few of us just chip in with everything that needs doing and it all has a very personal feel to it.

## What do you consider when booking and promoting a gig?

Our shows focus a lot on bands that share a similar ethos to us. We naturally have quite diverse line-ups – to us this just kind of happens as the bands that write about the things that are important to us (race, sexuality, feminism, environmental issues etc.) tend to naturally be more diverse. I think it's important to think about what you want your gig to say and who your target audience is, and to pick bands that are going to fit into this rather than just throwing together a mismatched line-up of completely different artists.

Choosing a venue is also something we do based on ethos and we've worked with The Georgian Theatre and The Green Room in Stockton primarily as our main venues. We opened dialogue with these venues by basically just saying what was important to us – things like the importance of a safe space for everyone without any kind of discrimination, we want toilets to be gender neutral and we want to offer free sanitary products.

## What's your process when it comes to things like promotion and discussing logistics with bands?

We design the posters ourselves or with help of our friend Tommings. We use social media to promote and make sure we poster our local areas. It's important to put a lot of thought into the poster; if you don't have illustration or design skills yourself you could source someone who does and make sure the poster is designed well, is relevant and helps sell your event. I think a good eye-catching poster can really help you promote a show. Discussing logistics with bands is super important to us. We make sure we're all very clear on what fees bands need and what they need in terms of sound, so the sound engineer



has all the information they need. Similarly with a rider, make sure you know well in advance so you can plan for allergies and budget for everything you need. It's super important to us to give bands some food and drink at a gig so we always make sure we've catered for that.

## What happens on the night itself?

There will be one of us or a lovely little volunteer on the door. We make sure bands are aware of their stage times. We organise a merch stand. We make sure bands don't run over and everything runs on time. We help bands on and off stage if needed.

We also kind of 'police' the night and walk around a lot to make sure everyone's comfortable, happy and having a good time. At your own gig it's super important to make sure everyone's feeling comfortable, they're having a good time and everything's running smoothly – being on hand to help sort any issues, whether it's someone upset in the crowd or a broken guitar on stage always makes everyone feel better.

Could you suggest any important 'dos and

## don'ts' when it comes to running your own show?

Think about target audiences and bands. Make sure you give yourself enough time to do everything properly, i.e. promote the show and get all info you need from bands. Make sure you're aware of the situation with equipment in plenty of time. Look after bands – you wouldn't have a show without them and make sure your audience is always feeling safe. Don't leave things to the last minute, don't not show up to your own gig (it happens) and don't expect bands to buy their own drinks at the bar – it's important you look after them so ensure at the bare minimum they get some drink tokens/drinks backstage. Put yourself in the shoes of the bands, the audience, the sound technician etc. and think about how you'd like to be treated if you were them and make sure you deliver that standard! Have a lovely time yourself on the night – if you've prepared everything in advance it hopefully shouldn't be too stressful and you can go home feeling all warm and proud of what you achieved!

# DOING IT YOURSELF

DIY gigs can be a rewarding way to get your music out there and connect directly with your fans. Follow our step-by-step guide to ensure a stress-free and enjoyable experience for all.

**Consider your aims.** There could be a variety of reasons for putting an event on; from promoting your own music, to showcasing some of your favourite bands, or running a charity gig.

**Think about what you enjoy at a gig** and how you can make your show a comfortable and enjoyable experience for all.

**Choose artists that complement each other's sound,** but try to make the line-up as varied and interesting as you can. You should also strive to make your show diverse and gender balanced.

**Make sure you're clear about fees and riders,** so everyone knows what to expect.

**Scout out local spaces;** make sure your chosen venue is the right size for your show. You may also want to consider how close it is to public transport, accessibility issues and what equipment is available to use.

If your venue doesn't come with in-house equipment you'll need to **hire a PA and sound engineer** - factor that into your budget.

**Get your event tickets on sale** - try sites like See Tickets, WeGotTickets, Skiddle or fair-trade ticketing company Brown Paper Tickets.

**Promote, promote, promote!** Design some posters and put them up in the venue and

local spaces (record shops, takeaways, other venues and pubs). Make use of your social media networks and encourage other bands on the line-up to do the same.

Email your local magazine or newspaper and tell regional blogs. **Give yourself plenty of time to promote the show** - at least six weeks.

**Organise the backline and equipment sharing.** Ask each band if they're able to supply something everyone can share, it'll cut down on changeover times.

**Give tech specs to your sound engineer.** Discuss soundchecks with the venue and sound engineer, and make sure there's adequate time for everyone to soundcheck before the doors open (try to schedule at least 30-45 minutes per band).

**On the night itself** consider if you need someone to man the door and deal with tickets, or a stage manager who can make sure everyone goes on and off stage on time.

**Keep an eye on timings** so the gig doesn't run late. It's your duty to encourage a safe and fun environment, and make sure everyone's behaving responsibly.

**Don't forget to thank the venue, tech team and bands** who performed. Share some photos on your social media channels.



Image by Michael Sreenan

## INSIDE VIEW: KINGSLEY HALL

Kingsley Hall is part of Benefits, a band from Teesside that tries to write about the political and social urgencies that are relevant to us today. Their music has developed quickly since forming in late 2019, blossoming into an abstract mix of spoken word, shouting, intense electro noise and hardcore punk.

**[www.benefitsband.com](http://www.benefitsband.com)**

### **The best thing about being a musician is...**

The camaraderie and support you get from your fellow bandmates. It doesn't even have to be music related; it could be about anything. Hold each other up, music isn't everything.

### **My proudest achievement is...**

...that Benefits connects with a massively diverse bunch of people. It's heartening to know that the concerns we have are shared by others, and that the way we express them is supported. We're well aware that we're not an easy band to love, there's no choruses to sing along to, and we're certainly not doing this for platitudes or pats on the back, but to know that people can relate to what we're saying definitely helps.

### **In my opinion, the most common mistakes made by musicians are...**

Craving, or feeling that you deserve, fame. Stop it.

### **My best piece of advice is...**

Never stop writing. Don't delay releases awaiting imagined maximum exposure. Seize the day. Just get on with it and stop moaning.

### **My top tips for playing live are...**

Be punctual and don't faff about during soundcheck. Manners cost nothing.

### **The best gig I've ever played was...**

Disgraceland, Middlesbrough. Everything was a bit ramshackle; stage times were ignored; there was no room to move on stage (the floor) without tripping over a cable and potential electrocution; the crowd were rammed up against the band crammed into a converted front room of a terraced house; the power kept cutting out; we played everything too fast and too loud. Benefits isn't about big stages, foot on monitor guitar solos, dry ice and fancy lights; it's about anger, honesty and intensity.



# PROMOTION

This piece of advice is true for everything in this guide: you will reap rewards from proper preparation! Plan ahead – whether that's a release strategy, promoting gigs or online content. Consider your goals and prepare everything you need in order to achieve them.

## GENERAL ADVICE

Consider a release strategy for everything you do – you might not want to aim for media coverage or airplay with every release, but engaging social media posts or a well-timed music video release will pay off for your fans.

Manage your expectations; don't expect to get critical acclaim or be featured on popular blogs or in magazines straight away. Promoting yourself effectively is often about building relationships.

Engage with the press through their socials by commenting and sharing articles; show you've done your research by mentioning articles you've enjoyed in your cover email.

Don't be afraid of following up; a quick email to nudge for a response could yield results.

Consider carefully the deadline advice given in Claire Dupree's article about press, but also be aware that some blogs work more on real time and only post reviews on the release date so they can embed Spotify links. It's always worth getting in touch in advance, but a nudge on release day won't go amiss.

## IMAGE

Make sure your photos and videos represent your ethos or style. Try to stand out from the crowd; people will often see your image before they hear your music, make it count!

Be original and inventive with your promo photos, create eye-catching and distinctive artwork.

Research photographers or videographers. You're looking for someone based on their style – their use of light and space etc., not on liking the bands they have worked with.

Great design can also help you stand out. Consider commissioning a local artist to create your release artwork or come up with something original yourself, and think about other merchandising opportunities – from badges and tote bags, to t-shirts and tea-towels!

## RADIO

Sign up to [musicbrainz.org](https://musicbrainz.org), the world's largest public domain music encyclopedia which collects music metadata and makes it available to the public; it's what all BBC shows use to collect information for artist profiles and tracklistings.

When contacting radio stations for airplay, try to approach DJs or producers rather than the station as a whole. Many towns have community stations and there's an increasing array of internet stations with dedicated audiences across multiple genres, look for the ones that speak to you and your sound.

BBC 6Music DJ and veteran musician Tom Robinson runs [freshonthenet.co.uk](https://freshonthenet.co.uk), an influential blog packed with advice.

## DO YOU NEED A PROFESSIONAL?

Consider this question honestly: are you at the right stage in your career to begin employing professionals like pluggers, PR agents or managers? The DIY approach is perfect for building relationships and can be a rewarding, enjoyable and cost effective experience; it can also be hard work, frustrating and time consuming.

When considering working with a PR agent, promoter or radio plugger do your research and get several quotes, make sure you understand what is expected of you and what is realistically achievable before shelling out your cash. Get recommendations on successful campaigns from your peers. Consider quality control: if a PR agent or plugger is willing to work with literally anyone, they won't do a good job.

PR agents and pluggers can be successful because they have built relationships with press and radio that you don't have, but remember there are no guarantees of coverage. It's not an exact science, watch out for unrealistic promises and anyone asking for money in return for airplay. Don't be put under pressure to work with someone.

What makes a great PR? Someone who believes they can get results for you, who respects your work and sets realistic and achievable aims. Avoid those who send out

blanket emails and call it a job done; look for PRs who have a proven track record, good communication and strong relationships.

If you're doing your promo yourself, consider sites like [submithub.com](https://submithub.com) or [musosoup.com](https://musosoup.com) to submit to blogs. Because they trade coverage for money, they exist in an ethical grey area, so approach with caution. On Submithub artists buy credits and choose blogs (who cost a varying amount of credits) to get coverage from, they also have a free submission service. On Musosoup you pay to be put onto a database and bloggers pick you up. Using paid services like these can be good ways to begin building relationships with bloggers. Alternatively, use Hype Machine ([hypem.com](https://hypem.com)) to find blogs that might like your music and submit directly – it's a longer process, but all it'll cost you is time.

Don't pay for coverage. Magazines and websites (particularly local ones) exist to promote your music, be wary of buying advertising – a well-written review will be far more valuable than an advert. Don't be convinced into paying for editorial, some publications will take your money in return for articles or reviews – this is not ethical. Paying for coverage or playlisting on Spotify or radio shows will only discredit you.

Check out [grassrootsmusicnetwork.org](https://grassrootsmusicnetwork.org) for recommendations, tips, connections and resources for employing PR agents and pluggers.

# PRESS: CLAIRE DUPREE, NARC. MAGAZINE

Claire Dupree is the editor of NARC. magazine, the home of alternative music and culture for the North East, in print and online. Here, she offers some tips on getting the most out of your marketing, including release strategies and the best way to approach the press.

[www.narcmagazine.com](http://www.narcmagazine.com)

A [clear strategy](#) will help to crystallize your goals and give you a time frame to work to. When approaching a release, have your music 100% finished before you start down the promotional path. Consider setting weekly goals for things you want to achieve, from when and what you post on social media, to when you'll be sending emails to press or requesting airplay. If you're in a band, assign roles to different members, and play to your strengths.

[Consider deadlines.](#) Monthly publications like NARC. work at least 8-6 weeks ahead of the publication date (which is usually around the first of the month), so you need to get in touch about your release with plenty of notice. For websites and blogs, around 2 weeks-10 days is about right. Set your release date accordingly to give yourself enough time to effectively promote it.

A [press release](#) aims to tell the journalist what you're doing; it should be concise and descriptive, but needn't be overly complicated. One A4 sheet of paper, with around 3-4 paragraphs is ideal. First, explain who you are, where you're from and what you're doing. Then go into more detail on the release; make it descriptive – what does it sound like, what are the themes you're writing about and what makes it unique to you? – make it sound interesting to entice the journalist into finding

out more. Next, talk about achievements – successful gigs, support or festival slots, include details about airplay and quotes from any good press you've had in the past. Include your social media, particularly the places your music can be heard, and your contact details.

[Don't forget the most important thing – the music!](#) Send a private Soundcloud or unlisted YouTube link which will be hidden from anyone except those with the link. Include the link on your press release.

[Don't underestimate the power of a good image.](#) When it comes to press and most social media, people will see you before they'll hear you – make your images inventive and interesting, try to depict yourself in a way that expresses your music. Images need to be hi-res for print, so check your camera or phone settings. Consider employing a local photographer, they'll have creative ideas of their own and a set of good images will be well worth the money.

[Set up an EPK.](#) Put all this stuff – press release, biography (if you have one), hi-res images, MP3s, lyric sheets, artwork etc. – into an EPK so it's easy to access. Utilise a tool like Dropbox, where everything can be found in one place, and make the folder accessible to anyone who has the link to it.



[Do some research](#) into the sort of places you'd like to get coverage – if you're a metal band, don't send your music to a folk magazine! Check blogs and websites and make sure they're active. Some websites do video exclusives or premieres for new tracks, there may even be an option to do video interviews or other sorts of features.

[Email is always the best approach](#), don't message journalists on social media unless they expressly ask you to. Some publications will detail their submission guidelines on their website, so be sure to follow those. Copy and paste your press release into the main body of the email (don't forget the music link!) and attach it as a Word document or a PDF. Always 'bcc' email addresses. Send your Dropbox link so they have access to anything else they may need. When you make your approach be clear about what you want, whether that's a single/album/live review, an interview or a feature.

[Any good press campaign should include radio.](#) Make sure you have a presence on your local BBC Introducing Uploader, and research other local and community radio stations. Coinciding your press coverage with airplay will help to build momentum.

[Build relationships.](#) If you've had some coverage, no matter how small and even if it's not wholly positive, always email to say thank you. It's good practice to build relationships with the press, and if you're nice to them they'll remember you next time you want something! Don't be disheartened if your music wasn't as favourably received as you'd hoped. Remember reviews are just the opinion of one person; try to have a thick skin, and hope that your next release is more up their street.



# PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOS: AMELIA READ

Amelia Read is a photographer and videographer from Northumberland. After graduating from a commercial photography degree her work now mostly consists of live photography, fashion and band portraits as well as music videos. Her work has a slightly retro style, and she loves to create imagery and film that feels nostalgic, taking inspiration from directors like Sofia Coppola and Wes Anderson.

[www.ameliaread.com](http://www.ameliaread.com)



Images: T-B, L-R: Amelia Read; Rick Fury; Maximo Park; Sam Fender; The Futureheads; Awkward Black Girl; Me Lost Me, all by Amelia Read

## What makes a great band or artist image?

Staying true to what the band represents is important. Do you want your image to be light-hearted and silly, or a bit more serious? The imagery you use should reflect the kind of music you make as well as your personality. A lot of the artists I work with prefer simpler concepts. A bold colour theme or an interesting background can work well. One of my favourite band shots I've taken for the cover of NARC magazine was of Avalanche Party in the middle of a housing estate, I had to grab the band for five minutes on their break from shooting a music video. The background is just boring houses and fences but it just came together really well. You don't need to go overboard to get a great photo but working with a good photographer definitely helps!

## What do you think makes a great music video?

I think a video that complements the music and the artist is crucial. A complex, concept-heavy short film is not always necessary as sometimes a minimal approach is better suited to the song.

Allowing the music to shine through is the most important thing for a video in my opinion.

Even though the video is a piece of art in its own right, its main purpose is to showcase the song, not distract from it. The music should influence the art.

## What should musicians consider when employing someone to create a video or promo photos?

I'm happy to shoot a fully formed concept or work with the artist to come up with something together, but I'll always contribute ideas and bring a fresh perspective either way. One thing I've learned is that the end product is usually a bit different to the initial concept. It seems to change and evolve throughout the process. When you're looking for someone to make a video, choose someone according to the style and look of their work. I've worked across very different genres of music, but my work is consistent whether it's a metal band or an experimental electronic artist. Try not to hire a videographer expecting them to make the video exactly how you want it without having any of their own ideas or input. You're hiring an artist, it's a collaboration.

## What sort of costs are involved in paying a videographer to make a music video?

The actual cost of a music video really varies depending on who you hire, whether you need a studio, extra camera operators, props, lighting etc. but a lot of what you're paying for is the time and experience of the people involved. Camera gear is also extremely expensive, so whether it's being hired for the shoot or the person you're working with has their own kit, that will be factored into the cost. I shoot and edit most of my videos on my own, so that lowers costs in comparison to hiring a big production company. I do think you pay for what you get, and it takes a lot of time, effort and expertise to make a great music video.

## What should musicians consider if they want to create their own videos and promo images?

It depends on the look you're going for really. Spike Jonze made the video for Kanye West's Only One entirely on an iPhone, so you probably already have the tools to make a video without even buying a camera. When I film with my phone I use apps like 8mm to really embrace the grainy, retro look. I think the most difficult part of a DIY style video would be the editing so it might help to have someone with basic editing knowledge help out. I once

made a no budget, handheld, DIY punk-style video where we included a load of shots from phones and the band edited it all together. It's a lot of fun and takes away the pressure of making a super polished video.

## Is there anything else you'd advise musicians to consider when it comes to image and content creation?

Keeping a consistent aesthetic is good as it makes your content instantly recognisable. I've learned a lot about branding in the last year and I think the key is trying to stay genuine whilst still having a plan or brand identity in mind. I used to think it would feel inauthentic to curate my social media presence so carefully, but it helps the business side of things run more smoothly and also helps you get in front of a bigger audience.

As an artist or musician you have to be a business person too. People often don't realise how much work is going on behind the scenes. I'm still learning though, and I do find it hard to post on Instagram all the time!

# RADIO: SHAKK, BBC INTRODUCING

Artist and presenter Shakk is the voice of the weekly BBC Music Introducing show on Radio Tees, which celebrates the local music scene.

[www.facebook.com/bbcteesintroducing](http://www.facebook.com/bbcteesintroducing) / [www.facebook.com/shakkmusic](http://www.facebook.com/shakkmusic)

## What should bands and artists consider when it comes to getting airplay?

Identify the right stations and shows that play your type of music so you can start to build relationships. Send your music and electronic press kits via email, and attend industry events. To be 'radio ready' your music must be a clean edit with no profanity, a professional sounding mix and master, and a high-quality production to ensure you stand out.

On BBC Music Introducing's Uploader make sure you also update your bio and use the track notes sections to update the presenter on what the song is about and what you are currently up to. It's also useful when we forward your tracks onto national stations like BBC Radio 1, 6Music and 1Xtra. Your profile will be a lot of presenters' first impression of you so make the most of it.

## What's the best approach?

Make sure your social media accounts look professional and are up-to-date. Share your stories and engage with your audience. Remember, every single person matters. Live shows are also important and another great way to get the attention of radio stations or presenters. Getting airplay can take time. Keep following up with presenters by email, and make sure your music and name stay at the front of their minds.

## How do you choose music for your BBC Music Introducing show?

I am looking for originality and something that showcases the artist's unique sound. I also consider the quality of the production, as well as the overall vibe and energy of the track, but nothing gets me more excited than hearing an artist truly be free and innovative with their music. I'm passionate about discovering artists who have a fresh perspective and a unique

approach to their music. Don't be afraid to be the true authentic version of yourself. That is usually when breakthroughs happen.

## Could you offer any tips on best practice when it comes to social media?

Being authentic and true to yourself is key. Trying too hard to fit in with what is currently trending when it's not on-brand for you could make your content seem forced or fake. Creating high-quality visuals is also important. You don't need a state-of-the-art camera for this; just your smartphone, a nice aesthetic background, and a little bit of creativity. My advice is to set aside one day each month for content creation to maintain a healthy balance and not be consumed by how well your posts are performing or the pressure of creating your next post or thinking of an idea for it. Alternatively, simply do what feels natural to you. Take your time with it. Once you figure out what's on-brand for you, creating content will become enjoyable.



# SOCIAL MEDIA: TIPS & TRICKS

Having an engaging presence across social media networks can be a vital way to communicate with your audience, and social media will often be one of the first places industry professionals look when considering working with you. This breakdown will help you make sense of the ever-changing world.

## Make sure you're only ever two clicks away from your music on your social media channels.

Use the same handles across all your networks, so you'll be easier to find. Make sure you have official pages and accounts so your URLs make sense and they're not just a bunch of numbers and letters.

Keep your social media pages updated – that includes using fresh images and an up-to-date bio.

Depending what your message is, some platforms will be more appropriate than others, so choose your platform wisely. Use Facebook for events and shouting about your plans, Instagram is ideal for visual stories and snippets of music, YouTube is the place to plug your videos, Twitter can be brilliant for engagement (particularly when you interact with others outside of your established fan base) and TikTok's good for just plain daftness.

It's better to be good at one, than average at loads. Focus your time and content on the one platform if that's what you're good at.

Use effective size images for each platform (square for Instagram, 9:16 for Facebook).

Use longer videos in HD with hashtags and captions to increase reach when posting on Facebook or Instagram.

Find out key times for engagement (use sites like [sproutsocial.com](http://sproutsocial.com)). Experiment with times and content to see what works with followers.

No matter what network you use, you should aim for your social media posts to be engaging and shareable to maximise your reach. Vary your content and post pictures, links to articles, opinions, 'behind the scenes' videos, show your fans your process and let them into your creative world.

Pair up your release on streaming sites with your social media campaign; invite your fans to pre-save your track on streaming services, it'll ensure your fans get the music first and also improves the track's algorithmic performance.

Consider paid advertising on social media to promote releases or gigs. Target the demographics you believe will like your music in places you're performing. There are pros and cons of paying for promotion on social media; make sure it's worth it – if there's not much money to be made out of selling your product is it worth fronting the cash? On the flipside, consider the increased exposure may equate to more streams or merch sales. If you target the right people, then it could be money well spent.

Finding time to create great content and engage with your audience can be tiring, but there are some tools that can help you. Facebook and Instagram allow you to schedule your posts so you can get loads done in one go; use TweetDeck to schedule Tweets or a management platform like Hootsuite which integrates with Facebook, Instagram and YouTube among others.



# RELEASE STRATEGY

Follow our step-by-step guide on releasing your next project

## WEEK 1

The earlier you can [organise promo photos and artwork](#) the better, but don't approach anything further down the timeline without getting them done

[Write a press release](#) and polish your biography

## WEEK 0

Music should be [100% finished](#) before you approach your release strategy

If you're doing a physical release, [factor in lead times](#) for CD or vinyl pressing so it will be delivered before the release date

[Research press outlets](#) you're sending your material to

## WEEK 3

[Tidy up your social media](#) – make sure your bio, links, photos and info is all up to date

[Make a plan](#) for when you'll be posting over the coming weeks and design any graphics you'll be using

## WEEK 4

[Make a video for YouTube](#) – even if it's just a lyric video, and start to build momentum

[Think about merch](#) – could you screenprint some limited edition t-shirts or create some interesting one-off goodies for your fans?

## WEEK 2

[Plan a launch gig](#)

[Pitch to monthly press](#)

[Upload to streaming sites](#) via a digital distributor at least 6 weeks before release day

## WEEK 5

Keep on top of [promotion for your launch gig](#) – get posters up, continue social media

[Consider a teaser campaign](#) on social media – use snippets of your music/lyric video to keep posts engaging

## WEEK 6

[Pitch to blogs and websites](#)

[Pitch key track to Spotify](#) via [artists.spotify.com](#) for the potential to be included on playlists

[Set up a pre-save link](#) and share with fans

## WEEK 7

Inform your fans about the release via an [email mailing list](#), if you have one

Continue to [shout about your launch gig](#) and make final arrangements

[Try pitching for a session](#) or interview on local radio

[Upload your track to BBC Introducing and Amazing Radio's Uploader](#) and approach any other radio stations you'd like to get airplay on – state very clearly when you would like your track played and time it with the release date so fans can seek it out as soon as they've heard it

## WEEK 8: RELEASE WEEK

Make sure all your [social media bios are updated](#) and reflect your new release

[Create a call to action](#) for each of your social media sites: Download/Stream/Buy Now!

[Utilise tools like Instagram Live and Facebook Live](#) to bring some immediacy, as well as traditional posting

[Chase up blogs and websites](#), some will only cover you once the release has come out

[Send your track to Tom Robinson's Fresh On The Net](#) for some potential BBC 6Music airplay

## WEEKS 9...10...11...

[The social media posts don't end on release day](#); vary your content throughout the coming weeks and keep momentum going by shouting about any reviews that come in or airplay you get

# RECORDING

Rob Irish, musician, producer and co-founder of Darlington collective Tracks, offers up a few tips on how to get the best out of your recording situation – in the studio and at home.

[www.rob.irish](http://www.rob.irish)

## WORKING IN A STUDIO

When it comes to choosing a studio and an engineer to work with, **the most important thing is being comfortable**. Visit studios first or seek out pictures and testimonials.

**Practice!** Studio time is expensive and isn't best spent sat working out your parts. Make sure you know what you want to play well in advance, and you've got it down. On the other hand, sometimes you find ideas and inspiration on the day when you're in the vibe, and it's a great opportunity to think freely and experiment. Just make sure the backbone's there, first!

**Objectivity is crucial**. Bands and artists can disappear down a rabbit hole very easily and can start to pile on unnecessary things and can lose sight of the song or end goal. Having a producer who is keeping an eye on the process and steering the ship means that is much less likely to happen.

**Be realistic** with recording plans. It's all too common for artists, especially bands, to book in a day's recording and expect to lay down half an album, when in reality this doesn't account for a huge amount of the process – set-up time, multiple takes, changing set-ups for different songs/instruments, mixing etc., not to mention making sure there's enough time to enjoy yourselves too!

**Always book more time than you need**, and as costly as it sounds, in an ideal world recording only one or two songs max in a day ensures you'll get the time you need to sound the best you can.

**Practice recording to a click**. One of the biggest shocks new artists to the studio find is how difficult it is to stay in time if they've not done it before. The more comfortable and confident you can be in advance, the better your performance will be, and ultimately the song.

**Finding production and mixing references** to show your engineers can really help guide them to the sound you're looking for. A word of caution though: going into a studio and just saying "make us sound like Tame Impala" could set you up for disappointment if you haven't thought through how you're actually going to achieve that sound. Other artists should only ever be inspirational, and you should always aspire to craft your own personal sound.

**Ask yourself whether it's solely studio time that you need**, or whether you need writing and/or production time too. Many producers are happy to do write extra parts, but ensure they know that you'll be wanting to spend time writing, or working with a producer separately to write the track, and treating studio recording as just the last step in the process to lay it all down.

**Don't forget about mixing and mastering time too**. Your job as an artist's done when you

leave the studio, but the engineer's still got to cut through all those tracks and turn them into a record. Bear in mind there may also be separate charges for mixing and mastering. They also often offer the choice of attended or unattended – unattended is usually slightly cheaper as it lets the engineer just do their thing, but attended can be fun to involve yourself in crafting the sound, have a say in choosing parts and learn about the process.

**Record your own demos if you can** – for bands, that could be as simple as a phone in your practice room, or for solo artists, some basic recording gear and software at home can help you lay down some ideas.

## RECORDING AT HOME

If you're able to **experiment with your sound at home**, you will be able to decide what elements work for your music and you'll ultimately approach that studio session with confidence and come out of it with a stronger song.

**There are plenty of really affordable recording solutions out there**, and all you need is a little interface, one mic, and some free recording software.

**The strength of songs is always in their musical**

**ideas and performances** – don't be put off by the fact you might not have some beautiful vintage tube mic or top end mixing plugins, or even if you feel like you lack the skills and knowledge, the important thing is you start, feel inspired and you can learn the rest along that way, and build slowly.

If in doubt, **YouTube the heck out of everything!** There's a tutorial for anything you could need. Google your way to victory!

**Find some musical friends who are happy to give you honest feedback** on your songs. It's great to give your friends a listen, but you'll often find nothing but lovely positive feedback – seek out a few more critical ears as well, those more likely to give you constructive feedback you can improve with, and that way you can get a bit of both worlds.

**Good monitoring is a big deal** – if you can't afford nice speakers to begin with try investing in some decent over-ear headphones so you can really start to hear the details in your sounds. Don't try to produce and mix on laptop speakers as there's so much you can't hear on them (especially lower frequencies), they might sound great at first, but on playing them back through a better system you might get a shock!

There are loads of ways you can **improve the sound you get recording at home**. Everything from using pop shields and reflection filters, to putting up blankets and sound panels, or just choosing where to place the mic in the room to get the least reflections off walls and ceilings for the crispest sound you can.



# PRODUCTION: PADDY JORDAN

Paddy Jordan has been working as a music producer in the North East for nearly 20 years, producing music for bands such as Young Rebel Set (with whom he was also a songwriter and lead guitarist), Cattle & Cane, Be Quiet. Shout Loud! and Abel Raise The Cain, and has worked with artists including Eve Conway, Chloe Chadwick, Alistair James, Amelia Coburn, Samantha Durnan and Jodie Nicholson.

[www.facebook.com/patrickjordanmusic](https://www.facebook.com/patrickjordanmusic)

## Can you explain what the role of a producer is?

Ideally, a producer should bring out the best in the artist by creating the right environment for them to flourish; guiding them and supporting their vision. For me, the key element is to ensure that the artist is able to communicate their vision to the listener with as few obstacles as possible.

## What should artists be looking for when it comes to choosing a producer?

Consider the work the producer has done previously and make sure the music resonates with you. Also consider if you are ready to actually work with someone outside of your band (also true of solo artists). Working with a producer means allowing someone else into your tight knit circle and to listen to new/different ideas. Don't judge them by the equipment they own. Yes, it is amazing to see lots of impressive outboard gear and huge mixing desks, but if the engineer/producer doesn't know how to use them properly then the end product may as well have been recorded on a potato.

## How should artists prepare for beginning work with a producer?

I never work with an artist or band without asking them to send me a live recording of the song first, and sometimes that can just be a phone recording of them in a rehearsal room. The last thing a band wants is to turn up to a studio and waste hours while the guitarist tries to figure out parts or once someone starts recording their part in isolation from the band, it turns out they've been playing the wrong

chords all along. Solo artists should ideally have a clear vision of how they want the track to sound – possibly even some ideas about instrumentation etc. before engaging with a producer.

## What are the benefits of working with a producer over artists producing their own music?

Objectivity is the biggest obstacle. I have produced my own bands (YRS) and my own solo material and it is very hard to stay objective. A producer will have the strength of conviction and the confidence to be able to say to a band or artist "this is it, it is done".

## If artists want to produce their own material, what technology could they learn to use?

The two biggest software DAWs are Pro Tools and Logic. When you start leaning into more electronic genres you will see Ableton and FLStudio get mentioned. The important thing to remember is that both are just tools; it isn't going to mean anything unless you have a producer/engineer who knows how to get the best out of the tools. So if you are a band wanting to get into producing your own material, start reading, researching, watching YouTube videos and seeing what goes into it. Just like with an instrument, mastery of it takes time and practice.

## Can you explain what the terms 'mixing' and 'mastering' mean?

You can generally split the production of a record into three phases. The recording phase (often called 'tracking') is getting all



of the recorded parts onto the recording medium. Once all parts have been recorded, the record enters the 'mixing' phase. It is here where a mix engineer will take what has been recorded and bring out the best of each part using tools such as balance, panning, compression, equalisation and reverb/delay. This is an amazingly creative phase as different mix engineers will have different approaches and can impart different flavours to the track. Once a record has been 'mixed', you are left with a stereo master file. This is one file that when played back has all of the components of the mix – unlike in the mixing stage where the engineer is still working with all of the individual components. The 'mastering' phase takes this stereo file and again brings out the best qualities, but there is limited control at this point as they can't turn individual instruments up or down or change mix elements. So the mastering engineer checks overall tonal balance and ensures that the mix is comparatively loud against other commercial tracks.

## Can you offer some tips on how to get into the industry?

There are lots of ways of becoming a producer

or engineer. You can go the DIY route and immerse yourself in all of the resources that are out there – the amount of free videos and tutorials and guides is phenomenal. There are many good courses in the area. The college that I work for (Bede Sixth Form in Billingham) runs an incredibly successful Music Technology course for 16-18 year olds, and I also do one-to-one private tutoring. My friend and fellow producer Jamie Donnelly lectures on a local degree course and local music legend Dan Donnelly is also working on a Sunderland-based degree course that is trying to bridge the gap between production and the business aspect of the music industry.

There is also the question of participation in the production-side of the music industry. For too long, music production has been male-dominated. We are starting to see more aspiring female producers and engineers getting involved and taking a really keen interest in the technical side of music. Encouragingly, most recently the course I teach at Bede Sixth Form currently has an 80/20 female to male ratio. The outcome from increased female participation can only be a positive one, for all artists, bands and most importantly, listeners.



# MANAGEMENT: BRADLEY KULISIC

Bradley Kulisic founded Singing Light Music in 2019, and offers support and guidance for artists releasing records, physical and digital distribution and rights management. He also manages Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs, Holy Moly & The Crackers, Esben & The Witch.

[www.singing-light.co.uk](http://www.singing-light.co.uk)

## Can you explain the role of a manager?

It will vacillate wildly between auxiliary creative/ bandmate, secretary, admin brain, shepherd. The actual work can range extremely from someone who sits atop a plan and barks a creative vision at the team, ordering them to go carry it out, to people that dedicate all their waking hours to chipping away at trying to make things happen. Both approaches have failed and worked. From my perspective, a manager is someone who is part of the artist's team who can help structure, organise, creatively fuel and enthusiastically push the artist, give them reality and empower them to be the best they can be. And make money in the process!

## What jobs and activities do you do as part of being a band manager?

My day to day role as artist manager involves: bigger picture planning; what does the artist want to achieve and why. Structuring campaigns; roll outs of new music, photos, artist info and using this to make the artist visible to help them grow in the right direction. Administrative work; making sure some or most (never all!) of the artist's business is functioning and in a position to build value. Building, coordinating and managing the team; be that the creative individuals, the live promoters, the live team, the label or distributor, lawyer, music publisher, merchandise and so on – whoever is in or we would like to have on board to go where the artist wants to go. Helping find and beat a path to go where the artist wants to go. Kicking the tyres on audience data, analytics, where how to grow, what the budgets are. It goes on and on. There's a practical element to all of this and an empathetic element too – it has always been a

very small amount of artists who are able to go full time after 5-10 years, so recognising this and helping the artists' creativity flow whilst also respecting their day to day needs (work, family, the topsy turvy world of life in general) feels like a critical activity from my perspective to empower the artist.

## What are the essential skills that you need as a manager?

Managing expectations (artists well as your own) is an essential skill. Managers cannot change the weather and culture is morphing all the time, so you can assemble a team, have great music, have your immediate friends and family and local area getting very excited about an artist but be unable to achieve even 20% of the interest outside of a 30 mile radius of your home town. Organisational skills whilst also being protective that you don't just become the artist's secretary is also an essential skill. It could be that's what you want, but I'd argue then you're more of a personal assistant rather than a team member who is helping push in a mutually agreed direction, speaking honestly to each other about what is and isn't working (from both sides). You're helping (not 100% responsible for) the artist's development. That requires truth at its core.

## At what point in their career do you think a band/artist could need a manager, and how can artists make themselves attractive to management?

Some of the best artists I know (in terms of longevity of career) have no manager and have found a path to make it work. Or have a manager but it's clear that if their entire team fell



apart one day that their career would survive. I think this is a potent fact that artists should become aware of.

I would guess the optimum time for a healthy artist and manager relationship would be when the artist is at a point that their sound is more or less defined, they are able to show they have creativity in the tank, they have the energy for the upcoming slog (no one gets gifted anything in this business!), and when the statistics show there's signs of an audience to build on. When they're able to articulate what they might want to achieve with an upcoming release or in the coming year and it feels realistic and achievable and possible to go further than that from a manager's perspective. If all those things are ticked then I would say that the artist is at least ready for a conversation about management.

## If someone wanted to get into band management themselves, do you have any top tips?

Be honest with yourself and the artist. Not mean; always be supportive and respectful of the creative's vulnerability and bravery to

put themselves out there for judgement. But realistic about what you can achieve and what your limitations are. Say hello to people, be nice, build connections. You will never know everyone (I sure as hell don't) and your learning will never be done either. Protect yourself; know that if your artist is earning a £1000 gig fee and the costs of the show with band, van hire, backline, tech people, etc comes to £1000 then you will earn nothing but still do immense work to help the artist achieve that £1000 fee. There's less support for you than there are artists and you will feel alone a lot of the time. If you can read all that and still feel the draw, then join the Music Managers Forum and become connected. Management work can help improve the standing of artists and when it does that improved standing has a trickle down to the wider economy – more gig tickets sold (busier venue, more beer, more merch), hiring of team members such as techs, radio pluggers, publicists, publishers, sync etc. It goes on and on. And you will be the last to be paid. But is it brilliant and exciting and amazing and a valuable thing to do? Hell yeah.





## INSIDE VIEW: JON HORNER

Jon Horner is a Middlesbrough-based multi-instrumentalist who plays in orchestral folk band Nel Unlit (among others). He also co-writes, co-engineers and co-produces the music he makes and is working on a film, play and a novel. Jon is also a member of the Spooker Rekkids collective.

[www.soundcloud.com/nel-unlit](http://www.soundcloud.com/nel-unlit) / [www.spookerrekkids.bandcamp.com](http://www.spookerrekkids.bandcamp.com)

### The best thing about being a musician is...

In a word, creating. There is no better feeling than taking silence and putting a song in its place. It's even better if you can do this with friends.

### My proudest achievement is...

It's not so much in the sales or attention a project gets that I look for achievements (thankfully). If we create something that is the best we are capable of and we believe adds positively to the cultural landscape, then that'll do. If it's well received, that's great too, but just because something is ignored doesn't necessarily mean it's irrelevant. I'm generally proudest of the thing I'm currently working on but our first album, Wake For The Dreaming, is a definite highlight.

### In my opinion, the most common mistakes made by musicians are...

Judging themselves against the bands that they look up to. This leads to a false perception that being an artist is a 'pass or fail' occupation rather than the ever swinging dial that it truly

is. All of your favourite musicians were rubbish once. It is possible to be a good artist and make something crap. It doesn't mean that you've failed. You're not a failed musician till you stop trying. Ask your (honest) friends what is good about it and what is rubbish about it. You'll be a better musician tomorrow for the experience. Being in too much of a hurry is a huge mistake! Be patient, both with creating it and promoting it. If you rush the writing and recording, it'll sound rushed and unfinished and then it was all for nothing. If you rush the promotion, you won't have given people a chance to hear about it and get excited, so it'll probably be mostly ignored. Set realistic deadlines that you can actually hit.

### My best piece of advice is...

Do it for the love of it. It's about the journey not the destination. If you aren't fulfilled playing to five people in the smelly back room of a pub, it's unlikely that you'll feel complete playing a huge headline show or a festival. Try to enjoy it for what it is right now, not what it might be in two years time.

# LABELS, DISTRIBUTION & PUBLISHING

Understanding the roles of organisations that make the industry work will ensure you're clued up and able to make the right decisions.

## LABELS

When it comes to working with labels, ask **what can a label do for you, that you can't do for yourself?**

Remember that **advances are not free money**. The label will own your recordings because they paid for them to be made. The song will remain yours but this specific recording of it is not.

A **'halfway house' option** is to make the record yourself and take it to a label for help with distribution and promotion. This way you're only sharing the money from sales, rather than splitting royalties too.

Consider an e-commerce platform like **FairSound**, which enables artists to fan-fund a vinyl release via Middlesbrough-based Press On Vinyl. There's no upfront costs and it's sustainable and affordable.

## DISTRIBUTION

If you want to get onto streaming sites, you'll need the **services of a distributor**. Digital distributors include companies like Ditto, CD Baby, TuneCore and DistroKid.

Distribution deals ensure **you own the rights to your own masters** and revenue splits are more favourable to the artist.

**Be wary of distribution deals which come with exclusivity clauses** and that take a chunk of your royalties in return for more streams or sync opportunities.

**Keep up with changing trends**; the landscape is always changing. Top sites include Spotify, Deezer, Amazon Music, YouTube Music, Apple Music and Pandora. Don't forget sites like Bandcamp for direct sales and streaming.

If you've got physical CDs, tapes or vinyl and you're going down the DIY route **visit your local record shops** and ask if they will stock your release (usually on sale or return). Even big stores like HMV will stock local artists, but you'll need a UPC barcode (Universal Product Code), which is used to represent and track your music as a physical or digital product.

## PUBLISHING & SYNC

As well as the more formal routes, there are **DIY options** including Sentric, who claim for and collect royalties. Their transparent deal entails an 80/20 royalty split (in your favour) and only a 28 day rolling contract and they can collect royalties from over 120 territories, as well as generate income from live shows.

When it comes to **sync deals**, Sentric offer sync contracts, as do sites like Syncr. You could also try the direct route – if want your music featured on a specific programme, contact the programme's Music Supervisor directly (you'll often find their name in the end credits).

**Have realistic expectations** when it comes to sync – it's a rare thing indeed for a band starting out to have a song featured on a Hollywood blockbuster (but it does happen!)



# LABELS: STEPHEN GILL, BUTTERFLY EFFECT RECORDS

Stephen Gill runs Butterfly Effect Records, a predominantly vinyl-based micro-label which spotlights bands and artists from the North East. Previous releases have included The Black Sheep Frederick Dickens, James Leonard Hewitson, Ceiling Demons, Nel Unlit and Girl From Winter Jargon.

[www.butterflyeffect1.bandcamp.com](http://www.butterflyeffect1.bandcamp.com)

## What made you want to start your own label?

It all started at Twisterella in 2016 when David Saunders and I were watching a lot of local unsigned bands, we were getting progressively more drunk as the day went on and thought we should create a record label to help them. At the same time Banksy had a show called Dismaland and, as luck would have it, one of the main pieces of art was James Cauty's smily face police shield which I had bought a few months previously, so I sold it and the profits funded the first Butterfly Effect record – which was David and Rob Irish's band, The Black Sheep Frederick Dickens. It was such good fun that I just continued.

## What do you look for in a band?

I'm looking for a few things; something I haven't heard before, a work ethic that will support/promote the release and I have to like and trust them. The last point is a two-way street. They need to trust and want to work with me too. If we agree to work together then it's really about making sure the LP is as good as it can be. I try to make the first 100 copies quite special, so they'll include signed editions, extras, different coloured vinyl etc. Promoting and having a release plan is also key – getting radio play, magazine coverage, live gigs, instores etc. I usually support that too in some way (normally

by manning the merch stall!) It's an expensive process releasing vinyl so we need to get it right.

## How does it work in terms of a contract?

I like the Factory ethos of no contract. Mostly I expect the band to pay for all of the recordings and promotion. Sometimes I pay for the vinyl release completely, sometimes it's shared – it can easily cost £1,500 to make the vinyl but it really helps support a band getting noticed. Once we break even then we share profits 50/50. At the end of 2019 I started a lathe 7" club, with releases limited to 40 copies which pretty much sell out every month. The turnaround is quick, the bands make their own art and I give 80% of these profits to the musicians. This has been a really nice project and as long as there is demand for the records I will continue to release them.

## If an artist wanted to pitch some music to you in the hope of being released on Butterfly Effect, what would you advise?

First is to be realistic. I'm not Simon Cowell with a team of people and resources to help. Secondly, they should really understand what they are going to do to support the music and its release. Ideally I'd like to see a band play live and also encourage them to watch other



bands on the label; I think we are a family so making connections is critical. Send me your best track – either via Facebook or Instagram.

## Could you give some general advice regarding approaching micro-record labels?

Research them – I have a broad taste of musical styles but others don't. There is probably no point approaching a punk label if you make country music. Meet up with them for a coffee/beer – and if you say you will then do it. I have had numerous bands cancel on me at the last minute for random reasons. Don't be upset if they say no – it's hard work and expensive. Labels only have so much time/money. Think about DIY – it's easier now than it has ever been. I have helped numerous bands release their own material and connected them to people who will help.

## If someone wanted to set up their own label, what advice would you give them?

Have a clear reason why you want to do that and try and stick to it. Have lots of patience and take deep breaths – creative people aren't always the easiest to work with regarding deadlines! And be honest – it's a small world, bad reputations get shared very quickly. This also means being honest with yourself – if you don't know how to do something then ask other people who you think do a good job. I have had numerous people give me invaluable advice.

## What should musicians be doing to make themselves attractive to labels?

Have a good work ethic. One gig a year and 10 fans won't make you attractive to a label. Have someone as an excellent publicist, network with all the amazing talent we have, play gigs, make videos and generally get your name out there. Releasing physical music is a risk so the more fans a musician has the less risk that is.



# STREAMING: HENRY CARDEN

Henry Carden is a music manager, mentor and consultant. He also co-promotes Middlesbrough-based music festival Twisterella. He's an expert on social media and streaming services, and here he demystifies the world of streaming.

[www.quietcrown.co.uk](http://www.quietcrown.co.uk)

## Which streaming services exist and what are their pros and cons?

Currently, there's the likes of Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Deezer, Tidal and YouTube Music. An obvious 'pro' for streaming is that it's very fan-friendly: people can stream music anywhere – whereas it's quite difficult to listen to a 12" vinyl on the bus, for example. A debatable 'con' are the royalty rates. However, for emerging artists, I find it's best to treat streaming services as a way of getting your music heard and growing your audience. If you're worried about the royalty rates (and even if you're not!), you need to make sure that you're also selling interesting merchandise and creating physical products that fans want to pay money for. Consider crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter and FairSound, and make sure you have a Bandcamp, which is an essential platform for all musicians..

## What's the first thing artists should consider when it comes to getting their music on a streaming service?

Is your song good enough to be released 'properly'? It's a harsh question, but there are around 100,000 new songs being added to streaming platforms every single day. That's almost three quarters of a million newly released tracks each week! It's increasingly difficult to cut through the noise and stand out from the crowd. There's no harm in releasing demos on Soundcloud before you release something on DSPs - it can be a great way of testing the waters with a new track.

## What is a Spotify playlist and why is it influential for artists?

There are a number of different types of Spotify

playlist, including editorial (such as New Music Friday and RapCaviar), algorithmic (such as Release Radar and Discover Weekly) and user (such as the ones we make ourselves). Spotify editorial playlists are pretty much the holy grail for emerging artists and if you can get your music onto them, they can be a great way of getting your music heard by a much bigger audience and also increasing your income. They shouldn't be your only focus though, as there's some fantastic independent playlist curators making their own playlists. Algorithmic playlists can also be brilliant ways of increasing your listeners – the more followers you have on Spotify, the more Release Radar playlists your new releases will go into, so asking fans to follow your profile is an easy win.

## What's the best way to get onto a Spotify playlist?

First things first, make sure you're signed up at [artists.spotify.com](https://artists.spotify.com) – there's some brilliant resources on there, so spend some time reading the articles and watching the videos. Next time you have a new release coming up, you can pitch a track directly to Spotify playlist editors via your profile at [artists.spotify.com](https://artists.spotify.com) – it's best to do this a few weeks before the release date, to make sure the editors have a chance to listen to your music. A playlist editor is somebody who has pretty much the best job in the world: they get to listen to music all day long and pick their favourite songs to go in Spotify editorial playlists! The best way to approach them is via [artists.spotify.com](https://artists.spotify.com) – beware unscrupulous companies who claim they can submit your music directly to editors in exchange for a lot of cash. They probably can't.



## What are the priority platforms for getting more fans?

This totally depends on the type of artist you are and the kind of platforms your fans are more likely to use. For some artists, it might be TikTok, Twitch or YouTube. For others, it might be Facebook and a traditional press campaign, and for other artists, the main focus might be Spotify or radio... there are pretty much endless potential priorities! You know your fanbase better than anyone, which should help inform where you prioritise your efforts. When it comes to streaming, I normally concentrate on Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Music – with the rise in the number of Alexa smart speakers, Amazon Music is a really interesting platform right now. There are artist apps for these too, which all help make sense of your audience data – so make sure you get them downloaded. The potential priorities are pretty much endless, so it can be a sensible move to just pick a couple of things to focus on. There aren't enough hours in the day to cover all bases as an independent artist, so use your time wisely and look after your mental health.

## Is finding success on streaming platforms and social media all about algorithms?

It's really important to remember that the

algorithms kick in on content that is performing well. If you put a video up on Facebook, it will initially be served to a small percentage of your fans and if none of them interact with it, then the algorithms are unlikely to push that out to more people. The same goes with a new track on Spotify – if none of your fans listen to it, it's unlikely the algorithms will kick in and start pushing the track out to new listeners. So on social media, the key is to post engaging content that your fans will interact with and on streaming platforms, the key is to get as many of your existing fans to listen as much as possible. Algorithms shouldn't be seen as the enemy: they work to help your content reach a wider audience.

## Could you offer a couple of general 'best practice' social media tips?

I'm a big fan of mailing lists and artist websites. They're great ways to control your own content and have direct access to your audience. For me, I'd rather have 50 super-fans on a mailing list than 500 Facebook followers who don't engage with posts. Social media is obviously still a great way of interacting with audiences, but it can get pretty relentless. Remember that it's OK to have some downtime, so don't feel obligated to constantly post. Chances are, you're gonna write better songs if you've got a clear head!



# PUBLISHING: JOHN ESPLIN, WIPE OUT MUSIC

John Esplen founded North East-based publishing company Wipe Out Music in 1996. Here, he gives some insight into the role of a publisher and how artists can make the most out of working with them.

[www.wipeoutmusic.com](http://www.wipeoutmusic.com)

## Tell us about Wipe Out Music.

I founded Wipe Out Music initially as a spin-off to a record label I managed which brought bands over from the USA to tour so getting any publishing income to help fund them was seen as crucial, but there seemed to be a shortage of indie publishers and none local, so that was the inspiration to start the company. Currently, Wipe Out Music has a highly successful roster of new and emerging talents like Billy Nomates, Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs, JOHN, Peaness and Avalanche Party alongside established and acclaimed acts such as Sleaford Mods, Jah Wobble, Stone Foundation and Emily Portman.

## What is the role of a publisher?

A music publisher's job is to control and exploit composer and authorship copyrights, proactively promoting the copyrights and collecting and administering these revenue streams.

We promote the catalogue to our network of music supervisors and help build the artists' careers by trying to help them acquire the right team by finding them managers, record labels, agents etc. to work with, advising on their careers and investing financially in them.

## How can a band get a publisher?

Three ways: Directly approaching a publisher – if you've some success and a good story that'll help; have a representative make the approach – it's always more tempting for publishers to be working with music professionals like managers, label and agents; or a direct

approach from the publisher – if you're good enough you'll become apparent.

## What does 'sync' mean and what does it entail?

Sync is short for 'synchronisation', and in the music world means the act of putting a piece of audio to a motion picture, whether that's in film, TV, advertisements, video games or an online usage.

Many labels and music publishing outfits now dedicate staff to seeking out sync placements for their artists. One of the main ways sync teams do this is by creating good relationships with music supervisors, who look after the music for a production. Keeping in close contact and regularly supplying music to these industry professionals is a must.

However, there are many ways to achieve syncs. Different services offer different opportunities for sync. For example, there are companies that specialise in achieving placements on YouTube, live sports performances, TV and more.

Sometimes you can just get lucky. By having your music publicly available someone might just hear it and have a use for it.

## What do you look for when it comes to working with artists?

We like artists that bring something new to the catalogue and those that have some originality about them.

An important work ethic is vital. We invest our time and money into artists and to be able to do that, we need to know that any artist we sign is going to be working hard as well in order



to achieve success. We look for artists who engage their audience on social media, play as many gigs as they can and are hungry to take their careers to the next level.

The biggest turn off is artists that can't get the basics right. If they can't be bothered to master those we consider them a lost cause.

## What sort of deal could a band expect to be offered by a publisher?

This very much depends on the situation. Initially a publisher will typically invest only time into the artist. Once their career builds the publisher will then invest a sum that they believe will further the artist's career and can be recouped from their earnings. Of course, it also depends on the size of the publisher. Major publishers take risks on smaller artists and advance them if they see potential in them in a way that smaller publishers couldn't afford. Most artists would love a big advance and the chance to sign to a major, but it doesn't happen that often!

Advances and other factors can also determine the percentage split a publisher offers an artist. If an advance is given, it's likely the publisher will want a higher percentage of revenue and a longer duration so they can recoup that advance. When an advance is recouped, the percentage a publisher takes is sometimes reduced.

The basic premise is – the more you want to take, the more you have to give in return.

## From a band's perspective, what would be the pros and cons of working with a publisher?

Helpful advice on copyrights, licences and how to market your music; a higher budget to produce music; getting your music to influential industry professionals; advice on where your career should be heading, including getting a record label, radio plugger, gig promoter etc. However, there are some things you should look out for: if you're given an advance, spend it wisely! You'll receive less revenue until your advance is recouped; if you sign to a big publisher and you don't excel, you'll be a big fish in a small pond. These big money deals with big publishers often have long terms and can sometimes include exclusivity clauses, meaning you're stuck in an agreement for a long time, but they'll not be interested in you and you'll be trapped. Make sure any deal you sign is right for you and don't run before you can walk! Always get advice on any publishing contract.

## If a band has a publisher, are they more likely to get a record deal?

Yes. A label will be keen to know that someone is actively working the catalogue and creating opportunities for artist exposure and increased revenues. The better the infrastructure, the more attractive to other industry professionals the artist is. These include: publisher, record label, manager, radio plugger, agent, press agent, manager etc.





## INSIDE VIEW: JAMIE DONNELLY

Jamie Donnelly plays guitar and sings the high notes in Teesside-based power pop rock band Be Quiet. Shout Loud! He also teaches audio-related degree programmes at Middlesbrough College (validated by the Open University) and produces music for artists locally, nationally and internationally.

[www.bequietshoutloud.co.uk](http://www.bequietshoutloud.co.uk) / [www.facebook.com/jampottt](https://www.facebook.com/jampottt)

### **The best thing about being a musician is...**

Music is a universal language and I love being a part of that.

### **My proudest achievement is...**

Be Quiet. Shout Loud! playing to a sold-out crowd at Middlesbrough Town Hall was pretty special. Even if I did keep getting lost trying to find the dressing room in true Spinal Tap style.

### **In my opinion, the most common mistakes made by musicians are...**

Rushing to get music out there without any plans for what to do once it's out. Either that or not soundchecking properly. Perform during soundcheck as you would on stage. Don't turn your amp up after the soundcheck, the engineer has you covered. Don't let your band's sound suck because you want to hear more riffs on stage.

### **My best piece of advice is...**

Take your time planning a release. Give yourself enough of a run-up to get radio, blogs, magazines, pitching to the streaming sites etc.

sorted and you'll likely have more success with the release.

### **The most important thing musicians should consider when tackling production is...**

Work out what the most important elements are and make them the loudest. When producing for Be Quiet. Shout Loud! the Pro Tools sessions can get really dense, often hovering around the 200 tracks region. Regardless, the most important elements are the loudest. If everything is loud at the same time, nothing is loud. It's all about light and dark. Quiet and loud.

### **The best tools for making music outside of a studio are...**

A smartphone. With my iPhone I can use Voice Recorder to turn my iPhone into a Dictaphone, recording chord progressions, mumbling melodies, capturing field recordings etc. You can then forward on to the next person for ideas. I've still got recordings on my phone that became Be Quiet. Shout Loud! songs, and it'll have started with the bones of the chord progression and arrangement.



## INSIDE VIEW: VENUS GRRRLS

Leeds/Hartlepool-based Venus Grrrls create punchy alt. rock with an activist focus on promoting participation, acknowledgement and respect of women in the music industry.

[www.venusgrrrls.com](http://www.venusgrrrls.com)

### **The best thing about being a musician is...**

Being able to express yourself through art and music and sharing this with other people. We also love travelling for shows and meeting new people along the way. We also like how each day is different, especially these days, it's not just about writing and recording. There is so much more work when it comes to creating content, admin, managing and collaborating.

### **Our proudest achievement is...**

We withstood a pandemic shortly followed by a cancer diagnosis. We've had so much thrown at us and we're really proud to still be here together writing music. All of the trauma definitely has given us inspiration for new songs that we never would've written, and the fact we're turning those experiences into music is really exciting and rewarding. These experiences shape your life, put things into perspective and allows you to express and create what you value.

### **Our best piece of advice is...**

It's really important to be getting involved local scenes and staying up to date with grassroots bands. We believe collaboration is key, work with your friends, network, meet new people and create together. Be open to work with others from all backgrounds. Be authentically you, don't let others tell you what to do. Be influenced and inspired by others, but create something new. Be open to trying new experiences and know a lot of the time you have to work your way up in this industry.

### **Our top tips for creating an engaging live show are...**

Show your passion for the songs you're playing. We're always trying to tap into how we're feeling on stage and the synergy between each other. If you can project and exude this in your expression and demeanour on stage, it may captivate someone in a way that stays with them.



# MONEY MATTERS

This section will help you navigate the world of royalty payments, understand legal and tax issues and signpost to funding.

The PRS (Performing Rights Society) collects money generated from the exploitation of composition and lyrics on behalf of songwriters and music publishers. When music is broadcast or performed, a royalty is generated. The PRS licences the usage of that music and accounts back to their writer and publisher members. Membership costs £100.

The PPL collects money generated from the use of recordings on behalf of performers and record companies. When a musical recording is broadcast another royalty is generated, but this time to the owner of the broadcast rights (usually the label) and the performers on that recording. It is free to join.

The MCPS collects money from record labels and distributes it to songwriters and music publishers. When a musical work appears on a recording that is sold, downloaded or streamed, a fee is payable by the record label or the digital service provider for the usage of that work. There is a £100 membership fee. The Musicians Union also has its own royalties department.

For more information about streaming and sync revenue see the Record Labels, Distribution and Publishing section.

Before signing any deal from distributors or record labels, it's wise to [seek some professional advice](#) to make sure the deal you're being offered is going to work for you. Local music charities (including Tees Music Alliance) can help signpost this support.

At what point might a band need a music lawyer? A lawyer is worth having when an artist is at the stage that they require contractual assistance. Some lawyers do engage with artists early and help them obtain a manager or label, but it's not overly common.

The Musician's Union website advises on [appropriate rates of pay](#) for live performances, composer fees and recording agreements. However, be advised that expecting to receive £128 for a gig run by an independent promoter in the basement of a bar in your local town may be unrealistic!

You're unlikely to make serious cash from small gigs, but [you should always insist on a fee](#) no matter the size or style of gig you're playing. At the least, your travel costs should be covered and some form of rider offered.

If you're planning on performing or touring outside the UK, [check the current rules regarding how Brexit may affect you](#).

Arts Council England offer a range of funding awards; due to the competitive nature of these grants (and the involved nature of the application process), they're possibly better served for larger projects.

PRS Foundation is the UK's leading charitable funder of new music and talent development. Open grant schemes are run four times per year, with additional funds including Women Make Music and the International Showcase Fund also available.

Help Musicians offer a variety of funds benefiting independent music creators, research, study and talent development. Their website also has a handy 'funding wizard' tool.

Another source of funding worth looking into are [local creative bodies](#) often attached to councils, check your local authority's website for signposts. It's also worth checking the North East LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) funding page.



## INSIDE VIEW: VICKY WRIGHT

Vicky Wright is the singer and guitarist in Teesside's groove-based indie band Salsola. The band are steadily gaining fans across the region thanks to an engaging live show and catchy songs.

[www.salsola.bandcamp.com](http://www.salsola.bandcamp.com)

### The best thing about being a musician is...

The creative processes. Performing is great and where you get the most recognition, but experimenting and adapting new material is the part I enjoy the most. Rehearsing something new, throwing ideas together and experimenting with new sounds is more fun than a gig.

### My proudest achievement is...

I try not to put too much emphasis on what gigs we play and just think about how we played. But I do always feel proud when we get good support slots or big Teesside festivals like Stockton Calling. However, the thing I'm most proud of is that we are doing it. For years I always wanted to be in a band and used to chicken out, thinking I wasn't good enough. Any performance is something to be proud of.

### In my opinion, the most common mistakes made by musicians are...

Not getting advice early on. There is so much great information out there (lots from the TMA!). Also, don't get overexcited and release your music without preparing. Do it properly, especially if you have spent a lot of time, money and effort on the record. Put the same

amount of effort into the release.

### My best piece of advice is...

To remember why you are doing it. I joined a band after a horrible relationship ended. I was left with no friends or hobbies and not in a great place. I wanted to get out more and needed more of an excuse to get creative. Salsola pulled me out of my funk.

### How can musicians and audiences be more supportive of each other?

Audiences – go tell the artists if you liked what they did, follow them on social media, share their stuff (buy a t-shirt too, it might help them keeping doing what they do). Musicians – talk to each other, share each other's social media, spread the word about how great the music scene is.

### My top 'self care' tip for musicians is...

To focus on why you are doing what you do, not the recognition or what other artists are doing. I'm a little anxious at times and can overthink so much. If you're not enjoying what you are doing any more, change it up. Take some time to refocus and reignite your passion for what you do.



# HEALTH & WELLBEING

Being involved in the creative industries at any level can be rewarding and fulfilling, but due to the nature of many creative practitioners' ways of working it can also be incredibly stressful. The musicians and industry experts we spoke to over the course of this guide provide a few of their tips on maintaining a healthy body and mind.

**Put yourself and your own wellbeing first.** When you need an early night, get an early night. If you don't feel like drinking, don't drink. Think about what relaxes you and makes you feel happy and do that thing more instead.

When you're on tour, or playing a lot of shows, make sure you **sleep and eat well**. Looking after your body and mind will pay dividends when it comes to your music.

Try to **get into a pattern of taking regular exercise, healthy eating and time outdoors**, and keep these patterns of behaviour up as much as you can when you're involved in intense periods of work like recording or touring.

**Don't overcommit.** Be honest with yourself and your band about how much time and effort each of you can give.

Remember, **a negative reaction to your song is not a negative reaction to you as a person**. When it comes to reviews, remember it's just one person's opinion.

Keep experimenting, learning and doing what you love – **don't get too bogged down in trying to make what you think people want to hear**. Stay true to yourself and do it because you love it.

**Don't try to do it all yourself.** Share the load.

**Stay focused on your own journey**, and build good relationships with people online, whose art you enjoy, and work together on creating a little community of like-minded people. When you feel low they'll be your 'go to' tribe. **Take time for yourself**, it's OK to take a break

and get back to it when you feel like it. There is no law that you have to be creative all of the time.

**Learn to recognise when you're feeling anxious;** symptoms can include raised heart rate, upset stomach, high temperature, breathlessness and dizziness, as well as jumbled thoughts, difficulty concentrating and 'catastrophising'. Your GP can help, don't be afraid to talk to someone about your experiences.

**Take time away from social media.** Don't feel pressured to be 100% entertaining 100% of the time.

## RESOURCES

**Musician's Union** – They have a helpful section about physical and mental wellbeing on their website, with downloadable guides and signposts to further support.  
[www.musiciansunion.org.uk](http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk)

**Help Musicians** – Providing help, support and opportunities to empower musicians at all stages of their lives. They also operate Music Minds Matter, a 24-hour support line and service for the UK music community.  
[www.helpmusicians.org.uk](http://www.helpmusicians.org.uk)  
[www.musicmindsmatter.org.uk](http://www.musicmindsmatter.org.uk)

**Hub of Hope** – The UK's leading mental health and support database.  
[www.hubofhope.co.uk](http://www.hubofhope.co.uk)

# DISCRIMINATION AND SAFE SPACES IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Sarah Wilson, co-founder of Darlington music collective Tracks and Noisy Daughters, offers advice and resources related to discrimination and safe spaces within the music industry.

The music industry is an exciting, inspiring and fun world to be a part of. However the nature of the music industry means that for a long time discrimination has been an almost accepted part of it.

Historically, women in music have been measured in terms of their resilience against misogynistic behaviour towards them. It seems that grand old ladies of the music biz rarely get to discuss their careers without mentioning the sexism they have had to deal with, almost as if it was a perfectly normal rite of passage. However times are beginning to change.

Following on from the #MeToo movement and other initiatives, the Musicians Union have set up a safe space scheme. Their recent study showed that 48% of musicians have been sexually harassed at work, 85% of those victims did not report it and 58% of people admitted to witnessing this kind of behaviour.

Our industry will only change with the support of the people within it. Report your experiences or cases that you have witnessed to help build up a clearer picture of the problems that still exist and together we will make the change. Some music venues and scenes have started to adopt a 'Safe Space' concept, having clear policies and procedures that make their venues inclusive, supportive spaces that offer a no tolerance policy towards any kind of threatening, divisive behaviour such as racism,

transphobia, homophobia or sexism. These policies not only inform the accepted behaviour of the audience, artists and crew but also dictate the programming of the venue, keeping it as diverse and inclusive as possible. In time this will hopefully create a cultural shift in our attitudes towards what a music industry should be: inclusive, welcoming and safe for all.

## RESOURCES

**Musician's Union** – Safe Space initiative.  
[www.musiciansunion.org.uk/safespace](http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/safespace)

**Rape Crisis** – Help and support.  
[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

**Victim Support** – Independent charity for people affected by crime and traumatic events.  
[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

**Galop** – LGBT+ anti-violence charity.  
[www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)

**Survivors UK** – Helping male, trans and non-binary victims of sexual abuse.  
[www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org)

**Love Music Hate Racism** – Campaigns and support.  
[www.lovemusichateracism.com](http://www.lovemusichateracism.com)

# FURTHER HELP & ADVICE

We hope this guide has been a useful resource for music activists; here at Tees Music Alliance, we're always on hand to provide help and advice to Tees Valley-based musicians with regular drop-in sessions, mentoring, conferences and workshops. There's a wealth of excellent support throughout the region too, as well as national bodies who can help to steer you in the direction you want to go.

## REGIONAL SUPPORT

**Tees Music Alliance** (yep, that's us!)

A not-for-profit organisation operating for the benefit of musicians and their audiences, supporting industries and community groups throughout the Tees Valley.

[www.teesmusicalliance.org.uk](http://www.teesmusicalliance.org.uk)

**Generator**

Support agency for the North East's music and creative digital industries, with an aim of supporting and empowering individual talent.

[www.generator.org.uk](http://www.generator.org.uk)

**Tracks**

Darlington-based music collective which develops activities and services for the benefit of local musicians, music organisations and audiences.

[www.tracksdarlington.co.uk](http://www.tracksdarlington.co.uk)

**We Make Culture**

Sunderland-based social enterprise delivering high quality music-making programmes across the city.

[www.wemakeculture.co.uk](http://www.wemakeculture.co.uk)

**Hartlepool Community Music Project**

Music industry resource which offers specialist workshops, seminars, artist advice and performance opportunities for the Hartlepool area.

[www.facebook.com/hartlepoolcommunitymusicproject](https://www.facebook.com/hartlepoolcommunitymusicproject)

**Musinc**

Providing access to high quality music making for children and young people on Teesside.

[www.musinc.org.uk](http://www.musinc.org.uk)

## NATIONAL INDUSTRY BODIES

**PRS**

Royalties, music copyright and licencing.

[www.prsformusic.com](http://www.prsformusic.com)

**Musicians' Union**

UK trade union for musicians.

[www.musiciansunion.org.uk](http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk)

**Help Musicians**

An independent UK charity for professional musicians.

[www.helpmusicians.org.uk](http://www.helpmusicians.org.uk)

**Unsigned Guide**

The UK music industry contacts directory.

[www.theunsignedguide.com](http://www.theunsignedguide.com)

**Arts Council England**

National development agency for creativity and culture.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

**Youth Music**

National charity investing in music-making projects for children and young people experiencing challenging circumstances.

[www.youthmusic.org.uk](http://www.youthmusic.org.uk)

# CHRIS & DAVE'S DROP-IN SESSIONS

Tees Music Alliance's resident music gurus Chris Cobain and David Saunders have over 30 years of experience in the music industry. Here, they explain how musicians can get help and advice at their regular drop-in sessions.

[www.teesmusicalliance.org.uk](http://www.teesmusicalliance.org.uk)

**What are the Chris & Dave Drop-In Sessions?**

The Chris & Dave Drop-In Sessions are an opportunity for musicians or music activists, at any level, to chat with us via Zoom or in person at The Georgian Theatre. Basically, you contact us, we work out a time that suits and then we meet up to offer advice or discuss ideas about anything to do with music. Between us, we have well over thirty years of experience in putting on gigs and festivals, releasing music, artist development, dealing with press and radio and loads more and we can usually offer some useful nuggets of information and inspiration. However, if we're unable to help you with our combined knowledge, then we can point you in the direction of someone who can.

**What are the most common talking points for musicians?**

Usually release strategies. Artists tend to get very excited when they have music and just want to get it out there as quickly as they can. We try to explain the advantages of being well organised and taking your time to give the music that they are putting out there the best possible chance to be heard and flourish. A lot of artists aren't sure how to go about putting on their own shows and that's where we can help; picking the right venue, putting together the right line up, making it a great event rather than another gig – these are some of the small points that go into planning a gig. We can also offer advice to any new promoters who want to know more about how the industry works or explain how working with an agent works and what to do regarding VAT and split deals, all the things that sound scary.

We enjoy meeting the artist face to face (digitally and in the real world), as by talking to them you get a sense of who they are and through a bit of chit-chat you can usually start thinking of different ideas and solutions that suit them as opposed to just reciting the same old standard 'roadmap to success' spiel. We also try and stress the fun and enjoyment that should be had in being a musician, as this can often get lost in the intense industry focus that music currently has.

**What other ways can TMA provide help and support for musicians?**

We put on music development events like our On Point music conference, music industry taster days, Tues-DIY music masterclasses (in association with NARC. Magazine) and more recently our #DigitalTenderness project (which includes this guide, songwriting classes and singing workshops) that offer musicians and music activists helpful advice and excellent networking opportunities. We also have our own record label, TLR, from which we release music from local artists and we also run various programmes with funding we receive from organisations such as Arts Council, Youth Music, local authorities and others, which offer artists various opportunities alongside one-to-one guidance from people in the know and for those artists we feel are ready.

For those who just want to reach out and chat via email, or would like advice on their work or plans, drop us a line at [hello@teesmusicalliance.org.uk](mailto:hello@teesmusicalliance.org.uk). Keep an eye on the Tees Music Alliance Facebook page and Twitter account for upcoming industry events.



# *Tees Music Alliance*

developing. promoting. enriching.

**Supporting musicians, promoters and  
audiences for over 35 years.**

*Independent music venues*

*Recording studios*

*Rehearsal rooms*

*Music industry advice*

*Music conferences*

*Music business advice and mentoring*

*Gigs and festivals*

