



NEWSLETTER

An Entertainment Industry Organization

What does a music producer do, anyway?

By Ian Shepherd

The President's Corner

Big thanks tonight to Kent Liu and Michael Morris for putting together such an impressive panel of producers. As a reminder, we are able to provide & present this type of dinner meeting because of our corporate and individual memberships, so please go to theccc.org today and renew your membership – we appreciate your support (and the membership pays for itself if you attend our meetings on a regular basis). See you in November!!

Eric Palmquist
President, California Copyright Conference.

The term 'music producer' means different things to different people. Some are musicians, some are engineers, some are remixers.

So what does a music producer actually do ?

In very pragmatic terms, the producer is a 'project manager' for the recording, mixing and mastering process.

She has an overall vision for the music, the sound and the goals of the project, and brings a unique perspective to inspire, assist and sometimes provoke the artists.

The producer should make the record more than the sum of its parts – you could almost say she is trying to create musical alchemy.

Every producer brings different skills and a different approach, and this can make what they do difficult to summarize. In this post I've identified seven distinct types of record producer to try and make this clearer.

1. The Engineer

This is probably most people's stereotypical idea of the "classic" record producer – hunched over a mixing desk, obsessing about compression settings, reverb tails and drum sounds. The studio is an instrument, and the producer "plays" it like a virtuoso, working late into the night to create a mysterious sonic masterpiece.

In fact this is often far from the norm though, as we'll see.

2. The Mentor

Many producers don't claim any technical expertise at all. Rick Rubin is a well-known example – despite being a self-confessed audiophile, he doesn't actually sit at the desk on the records he produces, but instead specifically chooses different mix engineers to work with on each project.

"Mentor" producers like Rubin instead focus solely on the artist's intent, motivation and performances, coaching them to produce the best music they're capable of, by whatever means. Rubin seems to have a gift for freshly inspiring and invigorating artists and re-focusing them on their core strengths, for example.

3. The Golden Ticket

Some producers seem to have an almost magical touch – a secret formula that guarantees almost anyone who works with them success. Phil Spector, with his trademark “wall of sound” was an early example, whereas in the 80s Stock Aitken & Waterman developed and instantly recognizable template for their artists.

Of course a distinctive sound is only a good thing if the producer’s style suits the material. Paul McCartney was famously outraged at what Spector did with “Let It Be”. Dr Dre is a more recent example of a “golden ticket” producer – almost single-handedly responsible for the output of a vast swathe of the biggest rap and R&B artists in recent years.

4. The Remixer

Many people think of the ‘remix producer’ as a recent development, but the origins are actually a fusion of Lee “Scratch” Perry’s dub remixes with Tom Moulton’s extended disco mixes in the mid-70s. Artists like Grandmaster Flash pioneered the use of cutting and scratching, and midi and sampling took this to another level. Remixing has now become so much a part of the mainstream music culture that often the remix becomes the hit before people know the original song !

5. The Musician

Perhaps the least recognized but most fundamental skill a producer requires is musicality. A producer will contribute, comment and advise on songwriting, arrangement and performance – and many are also musicians themselves.

Some even play on the albums they work on – Daniel Lanois contributed guitar to U2’s Joshua Tree, for example and multi-instrumentalist Trevor Horn played – well, nearly everything – on Frankie Goes To Hollywood’s “Welcome To The Pleasuredome” album. Also a brilliant engineer, he even combined the two skills by practically single-handedly inventing sampling through his early experiments with the Fairlight keyboard.

6. The Artist

Some producers take this musicality to another level by actually being the artist. The two ultimate examples are arguably Prince, with the infamously modest “Produced, Arranged, Composed and Performed by Prince” credit; and the incomparable Brian Wilson – who on his masterpieces “Pet Sounds” and “Smile” somehow managed to equal and perhaps even surpass the musical achievements of all “five” Beatles put together.

7. The Bonkers Visionary

Other producers simply defy categorization – for example Lee “Scratch” Perry, who some hail as a genius but others dismiss as certifiably insane ! Without doubt he was incredibly influential, at least until he burnt down his extraordinary low-tech Black Ark studio in a fit of rage.

Joe Meek contributed to over 245 records, 45 of which were major hits, all before the age of 37, when tragically he committed suicide. This was despite having no formal music training – or even being able to play an instrument. Somewhere along the way he became a key figure in the development of multi-mic and multi-track recording, as well as experimenting with largely home-made reverbs and compressors.

So, there you have the seven styles I promised. Of course many producers span many or most of these simultaneously. In fact, this is so true of the very best producers that they simply can’t be pigeonholed, and achieve an entirely different level of production brilliance as a result.

For that reason, I can’t resist adding just one more category:

The Godlike Genius

I’ve already mentioned several producers who I think deserve this title – Brian Wilson and Trevor Horn, for example. Brian Eno is another. As an engineer he constantly breaks new ground – he invented “ambient” and “generative” music, for example – and “My Life in the Bush of Ghosts“, his early 80s collaboration with David Byrne, brilliantly anticipates the sampling revolution of the 90s.

He is a musician whose playing effectively qualifies him as a band-member; a mentor in his innovative working methods, embracing mistakes and random elements; and a genuine “golden ticket”, as his work with Bowie, U2, James and Coldplay (amongst others) proves.

Perhaps the ultimate producer for me though, is George Martin. A mild-mannered English gentleman, his understated and brilliant arrangements both enhanced and transformed the music of The Beatles into so much more than the sum of their parts, and deservedly earned him the title of “The Fifth Beatle”.

His enthusiastic adoption of the latest engineering techniques ensured that there are still very few ideas in pop music that he hasn’t already exploited. He mentored the Beatles, expanding their experience of different styles of music; his use of sound effects and multiple takes and arrangements (on “Strawberry Fields”, for example) surely constitutes remixing and sampling long before the terms were thought of – and he added bonkers visionary sound effects, inspired by his time working on The Goon Show !

The common requirement running through all these types is musicality, and the ability to see the “big picture” while the artist focuses on details of writing and performance . George Martin exemplifies these qualities, and like all the names mentioned here he reminds me why I fell in love with recording, producing and mastering music in the first place.

The role of a record producer is that of a ‘project manager’, but at its best it can be so much more...

How to become a music producer

When most of the producers above started their careers, being a producer meant getting to work in a professional studio somehow – by hook or by crook.

Often this meant starting out working as a tea-boy or toilet cleaner (!), gradually working your way up to tape-op or assistant engineer, and waiting until one day the engineer was sick, or stormed out in a huff and you got your “big break” – your one chance to get behind the desk and show the clients why you should be the producer of their next hit...

All that has changed.

These days, anyone can be a music producer, with little more than a laptop, some free software and an internet connection.

Or can they ?

The truth is, these days it may actually be even harder to become a music producer than ever before.

Precisely because all the technical requirements are within almost anyone’s grasp, everyone who wants to record and mix music is doing it – and that means there’s a lot of competition.

Which means it’s hard to get noticed, let alone the chance to work with great artists or gain any recognition for what you do.

So, does that mean you should give up and go home ? No way ! Just be aware you’ll have a tough hill to climb, and you’ll need dedication, commitment, skill and not a little luck.

So maybe it’s not so different from the old days, after all.

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Panelist Bios

WALTER AFANASIEFF

Walter Afanasieff is a multiple Grammy-award-winning record producer and songwriter. He is best known for his long association with Mariah Carey, for whom he was producer and co-writer for several years, beginning in 1990. He won the 1999 Grammy Award in the Record of the Year category for producing “My Heart Will Go On” by Celine Dion, and the 2000 Grammy Award for Non-Classical Producer of the Year.[2]

Afanasieff has written and produced music for many other artists, including Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Luther Vandross, Destiny's Child, Kenny G, Michael Bolton, Darren Hayes (Savage Garden), Andrea Bocelli, Johnny Mathis, Kenny Loggins, Barbra Streisand, Christina Aguilera, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, Mika, Babyface, Josh Groban, Jordin Sparks, Tina Arena, Lara Fabian, and Leona Lewis.

PAUL FOX

Paul Fox is recognized as one of the most successful and creative producers in the music industry. His vast production credits include working with XTC, Phish, Sugarcubes (Bjork), 10,000 Maniacs, The Wallflowers, Robyn Hitchcock, Semisonic, Sixpence None the Richer, They Might Be Giants, Grant Lee Buffalo, Victoria Williams, REM, Ziggy Marley, Rod Stewart, as well as developing new up and coming artists as Tyler Posey's band (from MTV's Teen Wolf) "Disappearing Jamie", and SJ and the Revelations, with whom he has recorded songs with Peter Buck and Bill Rieflin from REM.

His “Paul Fox Presents” is one of the most forward thinking “discovery and development” companies around, giving up and coming artists access to him and his team. Using many social networking sites and his many contacts in the industry to quickly spread the word about the new artists that he is currently working with, he is always searching for the “next big thing”.

BRIAN KENNEDY

Musical phenomenon Brian Kennedy developed an appreciation for piano music at an early age. With formal lessons at six years, he established the foundation for the composer he became at eight. Gifted with the ability to hear and memorize scales and melodies, he would take songs and make them his own.

“I always wanted to play from the heart, rather than from something that’s been written. There’s no point in playing someone else’s music.”

Kennedy has a worldwide publishing deal with Universal Music and is considered one of the industry’s top up-and-coming producers. He has been on the scene since 2001 and caught his big break in 2006 when he produced and co-wrote “My Love” on Ciara’s platinum sophomore album, “The Evolution.”

His most popular credits include chart-topping hits “Disturbia” recorded by Rihanna which she performed while opening the 2008 MTV Video Music Awards and “Forever,” the 2nd single released from Chris Brown’s album “Exclusive – The Forever Edition” which was listed as #1 on the Top 40. Kennedy contributed to Oscar winner Jennifer Hudson’s self-titled debut album as a writer and producer. The effort earned him his first Grammy when it took home honors as Best R&B Album at the 2009 awards ceremony. Her hit song “If This Isn’t Love” garnered an ASCAP win for Kennedy as well.

Revered as a piano prodigy, his musical genius has afforded him the opportunity to work with some of the music industry’s top artists and producers, including David Foster, Polow da Don, Timbaland, the Underdogs, Brandy, Jamie Foxx, Nelly, Babyface, Clive Davis, and legendary songwriter Diane Warren.

Kennedy strives to create an original style whenever he collaborates with an artist. He is not genre specific and believes that creating music is much more than producing the next hot track or hit song. To illustrate his musicianship and stylistic range, his acclaimed single “Easy” for country music stars Rascal Flatts featuring Natasha Bedingfield is set for release next Spring, in addition to a pop/hip hop cut recorded by “Australian Idol” star Jessica Mauboy featuring Ludacris. He is currently working with Canadian sensation Justin Bieber, Will and Jada Pinkett Smith’s budding superstar Willow Smith and the über talented Cymphonique, daughter of rap/hip hop mogul Master P.

With sights set on translating the visual into the musical, Kennedy desires to do film composing and scoring in the future. He intends to follow in the footsteps of industry writer/producer giants like David Foster, Quincy Jones and Smokey Robinson and add another word to his list of credits..... Legend.

ALAN MELINA

Alan Melina : Personal Manager and Music Publisher

Alan is a senior music executive with more than forty years experience in the music business. He has personally signed writers and artists who have sold in excess of 1 Billion Records, and has held senior executive positions at both major, multinational corporations and at smaller independent companies, in both England and the U.S.A.

Currently, Alan is the Owner and Principal of the personal management firm New Heights Entertainment, LLC (NHE); specializing in representing Music Producers and their various Entertainment Interests and Brands, including their Record Label, Music Publishing, New Media, Film, TV, Games, Apps, Content and IP Initiatives.

Melina's professional credits include signing Artists as diverse as David Bowie, Sade, Lady Gaga, The Cult, Dead Or Alive, The Icicle Works and Billy Bragg; plus Producers RedOne, Adam Anders, OFM and Terry Britten.

Melina served as National President of the Association Of Independent Music Publishers (AIMP) for 4 years (10 years on the Board) and has served on the advisory board for UCLA's Recording Arts & Sciences Extension Program, where he taught courses in Music Publishing and Independent Label Management. He is also a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (N.A.R.A.S.) and of the British Academy Of Film And Television Arts (B.A.F.T.A.) and serves on the Boards of two non profits: the Neil Bogart Foundation for Pediatric Cancer Research and A Place Called Home, which provides an amazing after school program for underserved children in South Central Los Angeles.

www.newheightsent.com.

KENT LIU

Vice President of Business and Legal Affairs
Concord Music Group, Inc.

Kent has been with the Concord Music Group for the past eleven years. Concord is one of the world's largest independent record labels and is comprised of Concord Records, Fantasy Records, Rounder Records, Hear Music, and Telarc International. Kent is responsible for structuring and negotiating many types of agreements related to content acquisition (e.g. record deals, licenses, joint ventures, and distribution agreements), as well as copyright and trademark matters, and overseeing litigation matters. Prior to joining Concord, Kent was in private practice concentrating in the areas of music, copyright, trademark, general business, and intellectual property and business litigation. Kent is a contributing author to the Visual Artist's Business and Legal Guide and is an occasional speaker at law schools and MCLE seminars. Kent holds a B.A. degree from UCLA in Economics and Sociology and a J.D. degree from the McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific.

MICHAEL MORRIS

Michael Morris has blended his tax law expertise with a passion for music and entertainment into a practice that is unique. His practice areas encompass tax controversy and transactional matters; estate planning; music, entertainment and general business law. As a former trial lawyer for the IRS and a Certified Specialist in Taxation Law, Michael has the educational background and practical experience that enables him to provide insightful solutions to his clients' tax, estate and business transaction issues.

The entertainment industry is a niche in which Michael has developed a strong base of loyal clients. His interest in music and years of servicing clients in entertainment has allowed him to build a solid reputation of providing valuable and effective business solutions in such areas as copyright and contractual matters. His clients include recording artists, record labels, songwriters, music publishers, film and TV composers and record producers as well as post production houses, industry executives of major studios, talent agencies and on-screen talent. Michael has the distinction of being named a "Super Lawyer" among Southern California lawyers for 2006-2012 by Law and Politics Magazine and Los Angeles Magazine. He was also designated by the Los Angeles Business Journal as one of "L.A.'s Top 100 Lawyers" in 2009.

Michael writes law-related articles, moderates industry seminars and has served as the president of the California Copyright Conference. His published articles include "Songwriters and Music Publishers Continue to Score Tax Breaks," (Journal of Multistate Taxation and Incentives) and "The Tax Man Cometh" (Billboard Magazine)

Michael received his J.D. from the University of Arizona College of Law, where he was awarded the prestigious Order of the Coif and wrote for the Arizona Law Review. He is a partner at the Century City law firm Valensi Rose PLC (www.vrmlaw.com).

Do you want to focus on one music genre or develop your production skills and techniques across many different genres? Define your own personal vision as a music producer and you will, with work and practice become exactly what you envision. In the end all that really matters is your ability to produce viable music and that starts with your producer skills. Check out the Producer Skill Stacks series to learn more about the specific skills you need to become a music producer today: Music Producer Skill-Stacks. —. Discover a Step-by-Step Workflow Overview for Electronic Music Production and Beat-Making With This Checklist & Video Workshop Walk-Through. Know How to Finish Tracks and How to Do It on a Consistent Basis! Grab it and get immediate access below right now! First Name. In this situation, the producer does edit, structure, mix and master songs and entire records or projects. The next role is a less technical one, that of the mentor. When a music producer has this role, he usually gets to choose other audio engineers to work with him or for him, even though he does have the technical knowledge and experience to work on his own. Mentors are often there to determine which artists have the greatest potentials, focus on assisting them, and provide tips to get the best out of them, in order to turn them into successful established names in the music industry. Their purpose is to dig and find which the strongest abilities of each artist are, get them to practice harder to improve them and inspire them to create the best music they can. What Did “Music Producer” Used to Mean? The term “Music Producer” used to be more specific “ it referred to an individual that would hire the musicians and engineers, rent the studio, and pair all the right elements together to create a record. Their job was to put all the necessary pieces together to facilitate a record’s creation. However, most music producers are just doing what they have always done which is work with artists and help them create better songs. What makes a good Music Producer? I will leave that up to you to decide as the ideal music producer is someone who is a good producer for YOU. This is really what a music producer does and is thinking all the time. Am I a Rock Producer? A good producer is versatile and can do any genre and style. I’ve directed lots of bands in the past. Since I’m also a beat-maker, I love modern music, Hip-Hop, R&B, Dance, Pop/Top 40 as it allows me to do more myself which makes it easy to achieve my vision as apposed to telling everyone in a band how to play so these days I prefer to produce Hip-Hop, R&B, Dance and Pop/Top 40 artists. To Summarize!. The Role Of The Music Producer Has Evolved Since The Birth Of Sound Recording - Check Out 6 Definitions Of The Art & Craft Of Music Production! Let’s put this term under the microscope in a bid to find out where you and I sit within it - so, what exactly is a music producer anyway? As with all terms in the English language, there are several different definitions of “music production” in the dictionary sense of the word - what I’m interested in however, are the actual, practised forms, the definitions wherein we can actually point to examples in the real world.