

## How To License Your Music To TV & Film

### Workshop 2: Putting The Pieces Together Like A Pro

Here are some tips on how to produce your songs for TV & film. Whether you are recording and producing the song yourself or have an outside producer, there are some important things to pay attention to when it comes to licensing.

#### 1) RECORDING

- Once you've written your song, the second strategy is to make sure everything you record sounds top-notch. This is especially true with licensing. Remember, your recording will be the final version on the soundtrack. It has to sound as good as everything else that's getting into TV & film. This means it's got to sound pro. This is actually one of the easiest steps of them all, but is so often overlooked by songwriters. Music supervisors consider the production value of your song first, even over whether it's a great song or a great fit for the show. If it doesn't sound as good as everything else they're placing, they won't even give it a chance.

- When you send your music in, supervisors expect your song to be already cleared and ready to go. There's rarely time to re-record or remix anything. If you're not an expert in your home studio, find a producer who is. You definitely don't have to spend a lot of money on this, but make it count. This is the easiest pitfall to avoid, yet is one of the most common. I'm not trying to discourage you from recording at home and learning as you go. I've just seen too many songwriters who are starting out waste great opportunities with subpar production.

- If you are looking for a producer, there are plenty online that can absolutely nail what you are looking for but you need to do your due diligence first. Some of the questions you should ask them are:

- Have they produced music in this style before and does it sound awesome?
- Are they open to your ideas? You definitely don't want to work with a producer who can't take constructive criticism about their work or has a "my way or the highway" attitude.
- Another important question is, will you still own the rights of your song when it's finished, and are there any hidden fees to record with them?

There are a lots of talented producers out there, but make sure you ask those questions up front.

- If you produce your own music in your home studio, here is something you should ask yourself - does my stuff sound as good as the top songs in my style? Take some things you've recorded and then A/B them next to some of the best songs out there in the same genre. Now it doesn't have to be 99% of the same quality, but still, it's got to be up around 90%. If you feel like it falls short, just hire someone in the meantime while you get better.

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#### 2) PRODUCTION

When you are starting to produce your song with a producer or not, these are the most common things that are critical to your success.

- Listen to the sounds and approach of your favorite songs that have been placed in the show, movie or ad type you are targeting. Make sure your drums or beats have similar qualities in rhythm and tone. Listen for the EQ curve on them. Are they bright in the mix? Do they dominate the song? Are they more subdued or impactful? Hone in on the things that really turn you on about them and then make sure that your song has the same spirit. Now you don't want to just copy something that's been done before, but you want to make sure your song sounds like it belongs in the same playlist as the template song you're using. Do the same thing for the rest of the instruments. Feel free to replace a synth with a guitar, or beats with drums but really follow the spirit of what you're aiming for from your research. If you are using an outside producer, make sure that they understand that as well.
- Another thing to think about is the frequency of the instruments you're using. Chances are some of your placements will involve an instrumental only mix so your lyrics don't interfere with the dialog in the show or movie. The human voice happens in the midrange of the frequencies of what we can hear. It also so happens our ears are the most sensitive to this midrange; probably for the same reason. You want to be sure that you don't have an instrument in that frequency that could interfere with what the actors are saying. That doesn't mean to avoid electric guitars which also sit in that area, but make sure they don't dominate your soundscape or that the instrument part is distracting.
- As you are adding instruments to your song also think about the musical arc of it. You want to make sure your song builds or flows and ebbs as it goes along. A common mistake is to cut and paste sections of a song in the studio to fill it out without adding other dynamic features that keep the listener intrigued and feel like they're on a journey with you. Make sure it doesn't sound the same all the way through. Music supervisors will want to use the dynamics in your song to help the drama of the scene. Before you record, it's always handy to chart out the arrangement of your song with the instruments and their purpose in the song. You never want to stick an instrument or part in just because the other song has it, or you think there's space for it. Imagine that each instrument is a voice with something to say. If it's not saying anything that is adding to the song, don't use it. Use instruments to get across the intention of the song or the part. For example, if you're creating a suspenseful piece and you have some dangerous sounding beats in there and say, a mysterious synth pad over it, don't throw strings on top because there is space for them. Only add them if they are helping add another coordinate to the map of where you are trying to take the listener. The saying "less is more" is meaningful here, but instead, you only want to use what you need to and nothing more, is a bit more accurate. Basically don't put a hat on just because you have a head. Make sure it is a meaningful part of your outfit.