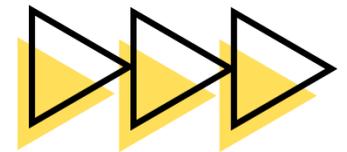


# 'Who's Really Winning From Your Music Career?'

The 3-Pillar Audit for DJs, Producers & Artists



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# INTRODUCTION

Here's the question nobody's asking you:

**Who's actually benefiting from all the work you're putting in?**

Every gig you play. Every track you sign. Every piece of content you post. Someone's building equity from that effort. The question is whether it's you.

After 25+ years in this industry, I've seen the same patterns over and over. Talented artists grinding hard, making all the right moves... for someone else's benefit.

This isn't about being cynical. It's about being clear-eyed.

A sustainable music career isn't just about talent or hustle. It's about making sure you're building something that's yours. Something you don't need to escape from.

**This audit covers three pillars:**

1. **PERFORM** - Who's benefiting when you play?
2. **RELEASE** - Who owns what you create?
3. **SHOW YOUR WORK** - Who are you building an audience for?

Work through each section honestly. The goal isn't to *score points* - it's to see where you're building real equity and where you might be giving it away.

# PILLAR 1: PERFORM

## Who's Benefiting When You *Play*?

Every time you step up to play, there's a transaction happening. The question is whether you're on the right side of it.

### **CHECKPOINT 1.1: Do you actually know your worth?**

Not what you hope to earn. What you're genuinely worth to a promoter or venue right now.

Ask yourself:

- Can you bring people through the door? Even on an early slot?
- Can you keep a dance floor packed and buzzing?
- What's the promoter's ROI on booking you? (Door sales, drinks, people staying longer)

If you can't answer these questions, you're negotiating blind.

### **CHECKPOINT 1.2: Are you racing to the bottom?**

The temptation is real. An opportunity lands that you've wanted for ages and you're ready to snap their hand off. The savvy promoter smells this - and will happily let you undervalue yourself.

Warning signs you're in the race:

- You've discounted your fee "just this once" more than once
- You're undercutting other DJs to get on a lineup
- You're playing for free at venues that are clearly making money

A fast way to make enemies (not friends) is undercutting the other DJs and performers. And working for free isn't sustainable. Someone's making money from you playing - or intending to.

# PILLAR 1: PERFORM

## CHECKPOINT 1.3: Have you done the real maths on that "opportunity"?

That international gig sounds exciting. Here's what you probably haven't factored in:

- Travel days (there and back = lost income)
- Flights, hotels, transfers - who's covering what?
- Meals, expenses, out-of-pocket costs
- The toll on your body and mind

I once flew to Brazil for a single night. Sounds glamorous. In reality, it was 3 days of my life for one gig. If the fee doesn't reflect the true cost, you're subsidising someone else's event.

Side note: Smart promoters negotiate deals with hotels and restaurants. They're probably not paying full price for where they take you. Keep that in mind.

## CHECKPOINT 1.4: Can you spot the red flags?

These phrases should trigger your radar:

- "We can't offer much right now" → Who's earning if the night goes well? Quick maths: door price × expected attendance = ?
- "We're not making a lot ourselves" → Then who is?
- "Help us build this night and we'll look after you later" → Get it in writing. Fee increments or the deal's off.
- "Play for us - just cover your own flights, hotel, no fee" → Someone's earning from this. It's not you.

## **PILLAR 1: PERFORM**

### **CHECKPOINT 1.5: Is this "exposure" actually worth it?**

Sometimes playing for less (or free) genuinely opens doors. But be honest:

- Will the right people actually notice you're there?
- Will it lead to paid work - or just more "exposure" offers?
- Are you building YOUR reputation, or just filling someone else's lineup?

The test: If this "exposure" doesn't lead to tangible progress within 6 months, it wasn't exposure. It was exploitation.

### **PILLAR 1 GUT CHECK:**

→ Are you being paid fairly for what you bring? → Or are you subsidising someone else's profit?

# PILLAR 2: RELEASE

## Who Owns What You Create?

This is where careers get signed away – often before people realise what they've given up.

### CHECKPOINT 2.1: Do you understand what you're actually signing?

When you sign a track to a label, you're entering a business contract. You're signing over your rights. This isn't a handshake between friends – it's a legal agreement.

Ask yourself before signing anything:

- Do you own the master recording, or do they?
- Does ownership ever return to you? If so after how long?
- What's the split? (70/30 in their favour? 50/50? A rare 60/40 your way?)
- Who controls release date, artwork, remixers, compilations?

I've seen producers nearly fall off their chairs when they realised the terms they were being offered – or how long they were signing their music away for.

### CHECKPOINT 2.2: Are you 150% okay with this?

Real questions to sit with:

- Are you okay with someone else owning your music for the next 10 years?
- Are you okay with them deciding when it's released, what the artwork looks like, who remixes it?
- Are you okay with your track appearing on a compilation you wish it wasn't on? (This has happened to me.)
- Are you okay with your music being relabelled as a different genre because someone thinks it'll sell better? (Happened to me – my minimal, micro house labelled as tech house without my consent.)

If you're not **150%** okay with any of these, don't sign.

## PILLAR 2: RELEASE

### CHECKPOINT 2.3: Can you spot the label red flags?

Watch out for:

- "We have your best interests at heart" → It's business. Money talks. Try not to let cloudy judgement lead to rash emotional decisions.
- "We get to choose which tracks are the priority" → Not you.
- "We'll hire the best remixers" → Do you get a say in who touches your music?
- Rush tactics: "We need this out before summer" / "Now's the window or it flops" → Designed to make you rush a decision about signing away your music baby for a very long time. Don't fall for it.

### CHECKPOINT 2.4: Have you had the awkward collaboration conversation?

If you're working with someone else - anyone else - have the conversation about splits and ownership EARLY. Don't be blasé about it. Don't keep things "low key and friendly" to avoid rocking the boat.

I've personally witnessed collaborations turn into nightmares because nobody wanted to clarify how things might look down the track.

One artist I worked with used to write songs and play guitar in a band - where he was technically the principal songwriter. After the band split, he rediscovered an old idea and wanted to use it for a new project. He reached out to his former bandmates to check if that was okay... only to discover they'd already released the track without him. No warning. No permission asked.

That's the kind of stuff that ends up in a courtroom, hiring expensive lawyers in Italian suits to fight a battle on your behalf.

If you have even an inkling that something you're cooking up has potential - get the conversation going.

*Write it down. Sign it. Record a video. Document it.*

## **PILLAR 2: RELEASE**

### **CHECKPOINT 2.5: Have you considered self-release?**

Signing to a big label with big reach can be worth the trade-offs: their distribution, marketing, quality remixers, exposure, potential gigs and income.

But self-release is NOW easier than ever. You keep everything - rights, fees, control. No middle man.

It comes with its own challenges. But it's a powerful option if you can make it work - and it's worth knowing you have it.

### **PILLAR 2 GUT CHECK:**

→ Do you own your work? → Or have you signed it away without fully understanding the cost?

## **PILLAR 3: SHOW YOUR WORK**

### **Who Are You Building an Audience For?**

You're posting, creating, showing up online. But who actually benefits from that effort?

#### **CHECKPOINT 3.1: Is this YOUR audience or someone else's?**

Ask yourself honestly:

- Are you building a true audience of supporters who follow YOUR work?
- Or are you building someone else's brand – a venue's, a label's, a platform's?
- Are you going through the motions, building something you think you should?

Here's the test: If you changed venues, labels, platforms – even pivoted your sound – would your audience come with you? Or would they stay behind?

If they'd stay behind, they were never yours.

#### **CHECKPOINT 3.2: Do you actually OWN your audience?**

Owning your audience means having direct access to them. A private space where you can connect without an algorithm deciding who sees what.

This could be:

- An email list
- A Discord community
- A Substack
- Any space where you can share news, music, gigs, merch – directly

If all your "followers" exist only on platforms you don't control, you don't own your audience. You're renting it. And the landlord can change the terms whenever they want.

## PILLAR 3: SHOW YOUR WORK

### CHECKPOINT 3.3: Is your content building equity or just feeding the algorithm?

Content that *builds equity*:

- Gives genuine value
- Helps others
- Shares knowledge
- Empowers and inspires
- Makes people's lives better

Content that just *feeds the algorithm*:

- Purely for clicks
- Ego-based (look at me, I, I, I - not we)
- Self-centred rather than generous
- Chasing trends you don't care about

One builds something lasting. The other keeps you on a treadmill.

### CHECKPOINT 3.4: Are you chasing vanity metrics?

Real talk: Having a lot of social media followers doesn't mean you're really good at making pizza.

- Clicks are not purchase intent
- Awareness is not desire
- Followers aren't necessarily following you
- Noise is not information

The follower count is just a number. Those people would leave as fast as they joined. The question that matters: **Would they miss you if you were gone?**

That's the goal. To build a following whose lives you actually make a difference to.

## **PILLAR 3: SHOW YOUR WORK**

### **CHECKPOINT 3.5: Are you building a brand you can sustain?**

The holy grail: A sustainable brand that brings you pleasure. That's fun to keep doing. That's true to your inner and outer voice. That matters when you share your work.

The anti-brand trap: Becoming stuck in a cycle of content you don't care about. Chasing shallow clicks. Writing music for someone else's label, brand, or old fans. Playing shows that crush your soul because you needed the money.

I'd rather make coffees all day long and play one show a month that's truly me, than sabotage my soul playing music I don't feel just to earn.

### **PILLAR 3 GUT CHECK:**

→ Are you building something that's yours? → Or are you feeding someone else's machine?

# THE HONEST AUDIT

Work through each pillar. Be honest with yourself.

## Where are you building real equity?

- Playing gigs that pay fairly and build YOUR reputation
- Owning your masters or making conscious trade-offs
- Growing an audience that would follow you anywhere

## Where might you be giving it away?

- Subsidising other people's events
- Signing deals you don't fully understand
- Creating content for platforms instead of people

# THE BOTTOM LINE

A sustainable music career isn't about grinding harder. It's about making sure the grind is building something that's yours.

Ask the hard questions. Protect your work. Build something that's yours.

Because the goal isn't just to have a music career.  
It's to build one you don't need to escape from.

# "Want Help Implementing This?"

You're building equity. Now what about the rest of your career?

If you're a DJ, artist, or music producer who wants to build a sustainable music career - not just be visible, but actually convert that visibility into music releases, gig bookings, or income - that's where I can help.

I run 1-on-1 coaching programs helping electronic music producers:

- Find their unique sound
- Finish tracks (instead of endless loops)
- Build careers that last

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