

A close-up photograph of a DJ's hands on a turntable, with a blue overlay. The DJ is wearing a black and white striped shirt. The turntable has a clear dust cover and a black slipmat. The background is blurred, showing other equipment.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A REMIX?

The aim of a remix is usually to make a track more accessible or suitable for a different market or territory. This is not necessarily always a dance mix, although this is often the case. A song can be given a “radio mix”, or even have a version that is designed to appeal to tastes in a different country (for example, a Latin mix).

Some mixes can be full of creativity and are thought to be better than the original. However, remixes are actually a marketing tool, designed to reach a wider audience or new market.

In recent years, we have seen big name acts demanding the services of the hottest remixer, almost as a ‘status symbol’ or to help maintain their profile. Acts that are trying to break into a particular scene will use a prominent remixer in that genre to give them a “leg up” into that fan base.

PAUL OAKENFOLD

Slane Castle, Dublin
Supporting Madonna
Sunday, 29th August 2004
Photography © Marc Marot



WHO WILL COMMISSION A REMIX?

It is normally a record label that will ask for a remix to be made, as it is the job of the label to market their product.

➤ WORKBOOK 1 – THE MUSIC INDUSTRY AND YOU – CHAPTER 2

It is not uncommon for an artist to dislike a remix and have it forced upon them by the label, who sees the possible sales benefits!

Where the label is less involved, it may be the manager or the act itself who will pick out a more suitable remixer.

Many remixes are commissioned through personal contacts of labels, managers, musicians, programmers and DJs – they are not normally advertised!

Sometimes, there could be a trade of mixes between artists, or a remix will be done as a favour that will be repaid with a share in the profits.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON BECOMES A REMIXER?

Sometimes, it is a band who achieves prominence within a musical genre that become highly prized remixers.

Well known DJs are a popular choice to deliver the kind of mix they will play in their set. Many top DJ remixers started out by enlisting a programmer or musician. In the same way, a proficient musician may need to team up with a DJ to tailor their talents to suit the dance floor!

The key strength to have is knowledge of current trends and the target audience. This could be a radio show, cult fan base or a club crowd.

Unless you have a manager to get you work and speak to clients on your behalf, you will need to be a good communicator. Being excited about the project will help convince someone you are right for the job. You will need to motivate yourself to work hard on your own, managing your time to meet deadlines.

You may think that a degree of formal musical knowledge and ability to play an instrument are essential, but this is not the case!

WHAT IS A COMMISSION?

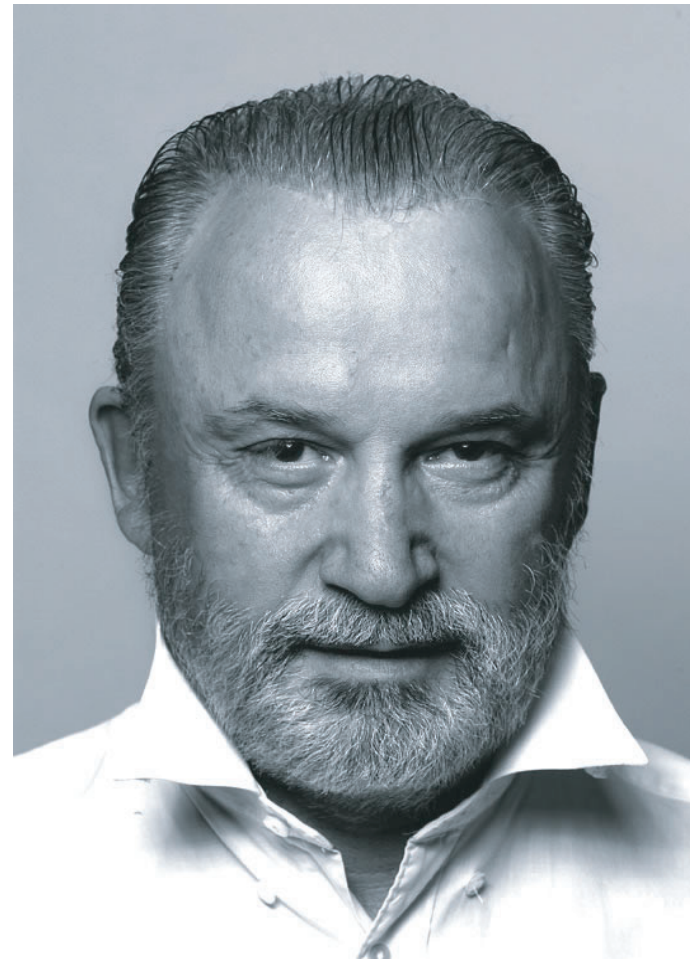
A commission is a request for a specific job, to a specific brief, timescale and budget. There is usually a fixed fee for the work, although sometimes a remixer can share in the profits too.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is useful to understand how remixing began, how it has developed over the years and what the current situation is.

During the **70's**, disco became popular and long after this came "the remix".

Producers such as **Arthur Baker**, **Shep Pettibone** and **Giorgio Moroder** used the "reel to reel" master tape to create a new mix incorporating more stripped down, sparse sections, often laden with effects. Unusual arrangements and extended sections became popular with the rise of the 12" single.



The **mid-to-late 1980's** saw Acid House arrive in Britain from its Chicago roots. A new age of technology in musical equipment helped to create this scene, and dance music became so huge it began to fragment into many different genres. As well as "Acid" or "House", we were given "Techno", "Hardcore", "Drum and Bass", "Jungle", "Trance", "Chill-Out" and many more.

The record companies quickly latched on to the popularity of club music, with a good club chart position helping to gain all important first week sales. Top remixers could demand up to £15,000 per mix and royalties too! Although some of the big name remixers are recognised with songwriting and performance credits, most are not. An exception here is **Paul Oakenfold** who is now credited as the artist when he remixes.

Nowadays, remixing is returning to its underground roots. Single sales are falling and with the increasing popularity of downloads, sales cannot easily be boosted by a range of mixes. After all, it is hard to be an extra track on a download!

picture left :
GIORGIO MORODER photography © Volker Corell
picture right :
PAUL OAKENFOLD photography © Marc Marot





MARK COMPTON

from FAF Productions was a guitarist in an act that was one of the first to mix rock and dance styles. This attracted remix work from other similar artists, also rock bands wanting a mix to play in clubs. This in turn led to work in a variety of other styles and eventually production work for major artists.

photography Ray Chan



WHAT EQUIPMENT WILL I NEED TO MAKE A REMIX?

All you will need, to begin with, is a computer with music software and a sound card, an amplifier and some speakers. This will be enough to explore the basics, whilst offering the opportunity of getting some good sounding results without the expense of a professional studio.

➤ **WORKBOOK 5 – RECORDING AND PRODUCTION**

WHERE CAN I GET REMIX WORK OR SOURCE MATERIAL?

Before you can be a remixer, you need something to remix!
This is your 'Source Material'.

You need what are called "Remix Parts". These are a recording of each instrument or element that made up the original track, saved as an audio file. Normally any EQ or effects from the original mix are left off, so as to keep the raw ingredient.

These files can come in a few different formats, for example:

wav

common on PC systems

aiff

common to Apple Mac systems

Cubase, Logic Audio, Motu or Pro Tools data files

Non - digital

files can be recorded onto tape or minidisk

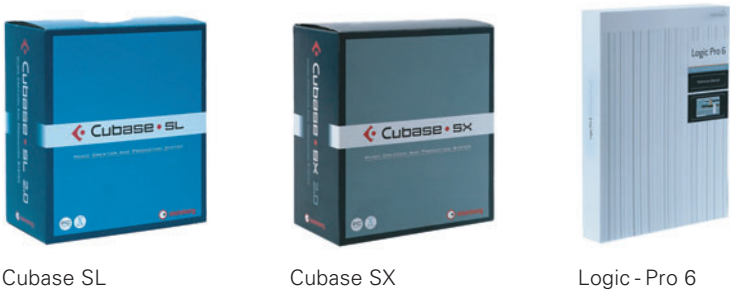
The data files can be stored on a recordable CD, DVD or hard drive.

They can also be e-mailed or downloaded from a web site, but if you use the Internet, a broadband connection is essential!

Parts can also be recorded individually straight on to Mini-Disk, DAT or ADAT, though this is now less likely, as they need putting onto a computer and then moving one by one to be in time again.



If software such as Cubase, Logic or Pro -Tools has been used during recording, then the song file, along with mix information, MIDI and all audio files can be stored together and passed on very easily. However, compatibility between various formats has been the cause of many studio headaches!



TIP

Take care when saving song files and the audio files that relate to it. Be organised, where possible keep them all in the same folder. This avoids losing important files and makes backing up a complete song straight forward.

Ask other MOLP musicians if you can share tracks to remix. Local acts or labels may be prepared to give you source material, especially if you are a DJ and can offer to play a track for them in return. You will need to put together a showreel of your work to help convince.

Failing this, there are plenty of web sites with samples to download, even acappellas (solo vocals) to experiment with.

There may be something lurking in your own record and CD collection that cries out for you to get stuck into!

note : Any details or photographs of equipment, software, manufacturers or suppliers do not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by DWP, but are intended to provide typical reference examples only.

WORKING TO A BRIEF

When you do manage to secure some remix work, you will be given a brief to let you know what the purpose of the remix is. This will include a description of what your mix should sound like, what it is designed to achieve and who are its target audience. This would usually take place as a conversation as opposed to being written.

SAMPLE BRIEF 1

Yo Dude, we have a country artist doin' big things Stateside and need a mix for European radio. Do you wanna have a shot at it, I'll send a hard drive with all the parts. Use what you want but try and lose some of the country twang. No real rush, we're just fishin' for ideas just now.



SAMPLE BRIEF 2

... we need a commercial club mix for our newly signed boy band and thought of you. I can get you a CD with the vocal parts, but I must have the finished mix on my desk Monday morning for the cut.



SAMPLE BRIEF 3

... these guys are one of the founding fathers of electro-pop, with a loyal fan base, so you'll need to keep the trade mark synth sounds as well as all the vocal. Their producer will send the "Logic" song with all the files, use that as a starting point, concentrate on giving us a more modern rhythm pattern and bass line.



Make your client feel part of the creative process whilst talking through your ideas; it is more likely they will like the result!

You might not be given a brief! Maybe you will have freedom to do whatever you like or the client knows what kind of mix you will deliver due to your reputation!

Record companies have tight release schedules to keep to, so your mix will have a deadline, also given in the brief.

Make sure you understand the brief so you can deliver what is asked of you. To avoid confusion, always try to talk to the same person, and make sure they have authority to speak about the project.



CASE STUDY

JOE ROBINSON Producer and remixer for Badly Drawn Boy, Volovan, Stazi, I am Kloot and many more

Where does the work come from?

I am approached either by the act or the label. If the project goes well, a good relationship generates more work. I used to have a manager, but now manage myself. It was nice to have someone dealing with the business end of things, but he takes his 20%. I would say if you have a manager who is finding you work then definitely keep them.

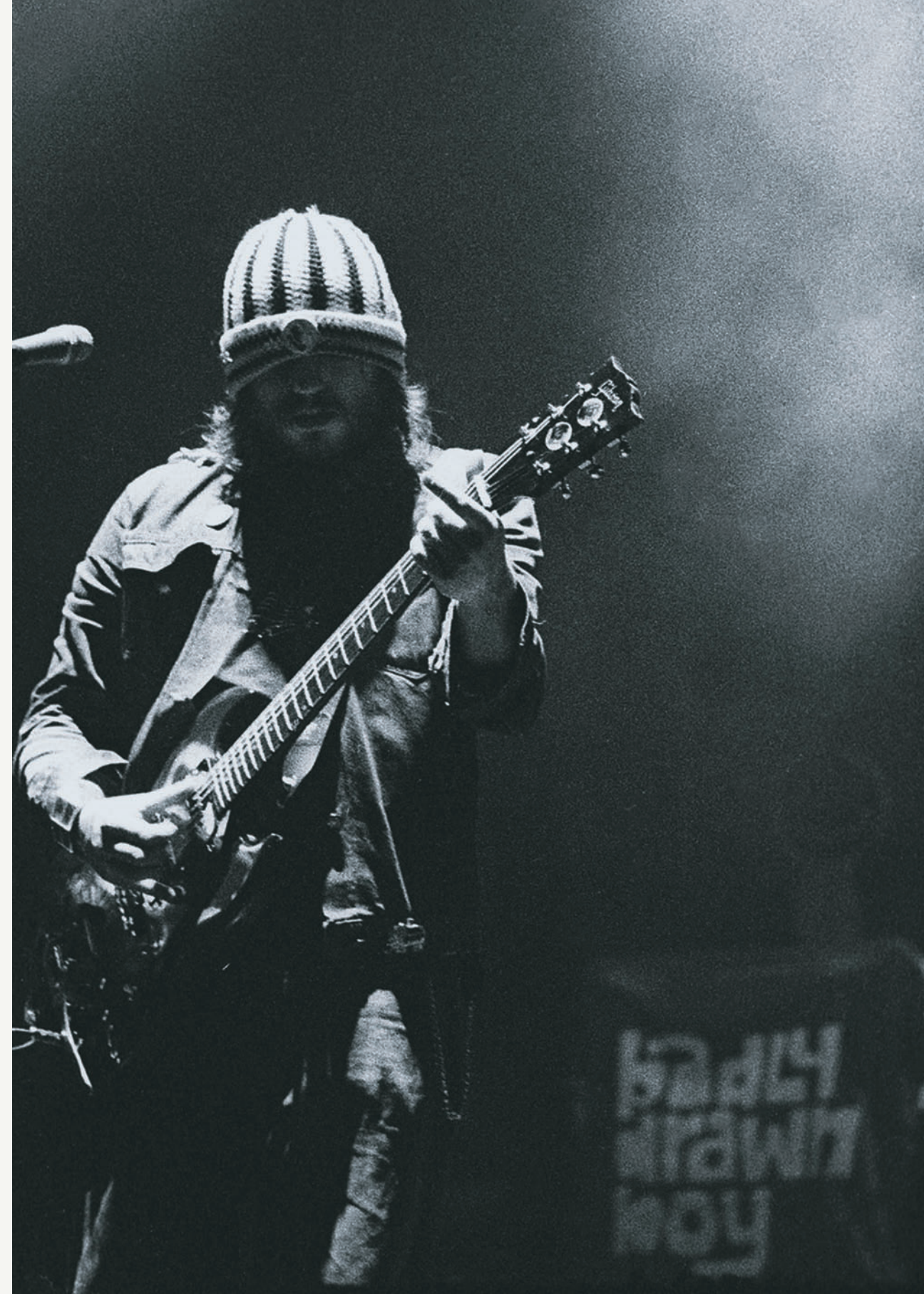
How do you approach your work?

Every project has a different starting point depending on various factors i.e. budget; style of music; timing. I like to be flexible & travel a lot, so a good working knowledge of different gear is essential Collaboration is the best part of my job. I am in the fortunate position of being allowed to "join" a band and work as a part of that creative team for a few weeks. One week I'm making slamming techno, the next acoustic singer / songwriter stuff.

Any advice?

Keep at it. I was on the dole & doing rubbish jobs for years (but always making music) before I started making a living from music. Also - specialize, get very good at what you do best rather than trying to do everything and spreading yourself thin. Be aware that you are entering a tough industry that is over-saturated by talented young people.

picture top : **JOE ROBINSON** right : **BADLY DRAWN BOY** photography © Ray Chan

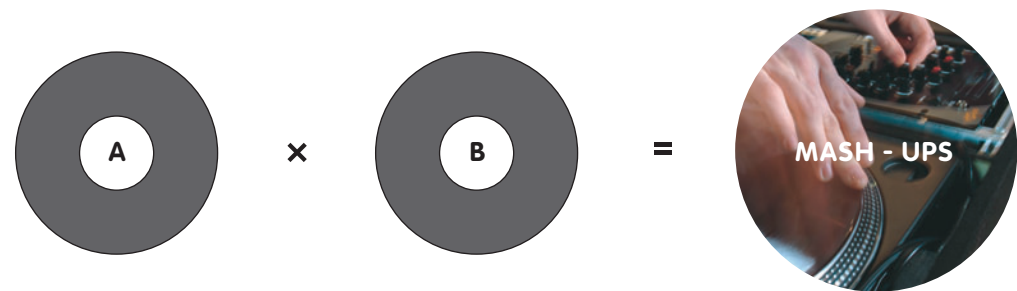


HOW DO I LEARN REMIX SKILLS?

The best way to figure out how to remix is to listen to other examples and compare them to their original form. Then try matching up bits of different songs and playing them together.

MASH - UPS

The current trend called “Mash-Ups” is where two records (often total opposites) are combined together, often giving surprising results. This phenomenon has become so popular that artists are holding competitions to find the best “Mash-Ups” involving their work.



e.g.
A : Kraftwerk Numbers X **B : Whitney Houston** Wanna dance with somebody

You should also try programming drum loops or beats underneath the vocal or hook of various tracks.

Soon you will begin to understand what kind of things fit with others, as you become more aware of groove, tempo and the key of songs. You will also become more adept at editing or time stretching samples to be in time and in tune.



Music Technology magazines have interviews with top remixers, where they describe work they have done. They may give some useful tips and insight into their work.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE? WHAT STYLE OF MIX WILL I DELIVER?

Get together a selection of reference materials (other recordings) relevant to your mix. They can be used as inspiration, as well as a comparison for style and overall sound.

Collect a choice of samples, loops, keyboard presets, patches and effects that you can find quickly, these will act as a sound library.

Why not visit a club that plays music you are interested in? You will learn a lot from listening and then watching how the crowd react. Improve your knowledge by visiting a record shop and listening to cutting edge records.

It is worth noting that it may benefit you to establish a niche market or trend within your work as it develops. Potential clients will identify your sound as reputation grows. If you are a DJ your set could reflect this and you can play your own tunes!



Why not compete in a remix competition or attempt to get your work reviewed on the demos page of a magazine. This will give you the motivation to produce your best efforts.



photography Ray Chan

HOW DO I BEGIN MY MIX?

Start with an analysis of the original piece.

What are the key elements or hooks? This is not always just the vocal. A bass line can be an integral part of a track, especially on a dance record.

Identify the hooks and the features you want to keep, check you have been sent these in the remix parts! Make decisions on what is better left out or recreated by you.

Start by listening to the key elements you have picked out and imagine what would work well with them. Refer to your reference material and sound library and then try a few things out.

Question the tempo and groove of the original. Could it be faster, slower or have a change of emphasis? Can you be creative with time stretching or editing skills, maybe cutting up a loop will get better results than just playing it in full? Experiment with different loops or try programming a few beats.

TIP

Don't be frightened of using a lot of the original material if it works with your idea. The act will be pleased you haven't thrown all of their hard work in the trash and it will save you lots of effort replacing or trying to better it!

BEGIN TO BUILD ON THE BASICS BUILD AN ARRANGEMENT

The rhythm pattern and bass line are usually the foundations that you will build the rest of the mix round. Get these wrong and everything can come crashing down very quickly!

Once you are satisfied with your basic groove, start to add features that are complementary. It is conventional practice to use instrumentation that supports the vocal, so you need to be aware of chord changes and key.

As the mix takes shape you need to think about structure and arrangement. Should you follow the dynamics used in the original or be more flexible? A club mix might benefit from a DJ-friendly intro and outro, where the track can easily be mixed with others.

Whatever your decision, moments of impact, crescendo and breakdowns should all be addressed. Again, check out your reference material for good ideas.

It is important to remember that there is not always a right or wrong answer in music, there is only taste and opinion. So be brave, an extreme idea is possibly just the thing that will make your work stand out, so experiment. Go with the flow, use your instincts, push boundaries, be confident with whatever works well for you.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

During your work take time out to reflect on what you have done. Ask yourself if you are true to your original idea and in line with what the brief said. It may be useful to get some early feedback from the label, just to double check you are on the right lines. Sending an MP3 of work in progress can be an easy way of doing this.

TIP

Remember, sometimes “Less is more”. So don’t over cook things and keep piling on more bits. This is very tempting when working with computers.

When you get a finished mix be sure to check it out on different speakers. If it is designed to be played in a club, then try listening to it in a club. Can you get your work played to a crowd and gauge reaction? Play your work to others and make any necessary alterations.

DELIVERY FORMATS

If it's not mentioned in the brief, you should check the format for delivery of the final mix (T.V. pass, acappella, instrumental, vox up). A vox up is a mix identical to the original but with the vocal up in volume slightly. This is due to the fact that over time you will have become accustomed to the vocal, giving a tendency to have it too quiet. So a “vox up” is a safety against this. Also, run off the other versions mentioned; if eventually your mix is to be performed as a club personal appearance or on T.V., you need a mix containing everything except the main vocal. Having this now saves recreating the whole mix later.

TIP

Apply some software mastering (maximising / compression / EQ) to your finished mix to make sure the overall level recorded onto a CD will not be much quieter than other CDs.



photography Oliver Kersh

CASE STUDY

KEIR

from Inch Studio started out as an accomplished musician, who had deals with a couple of independent Labels. Gradually he became more interested in the recording and music technology side of the business and went to college to learn more. He secured a work placement in a large Manchester studio and began approaching people to get work as a remixer. After completing some mixes “on spec” he made enough money to fund his own studio, going on to remix and produce many artists in his own distinctive style.

LEGAL AND MONEY ISSUES

Initially, it is likely that work will be undertaken on a speculative “On Spec” basis. This means that you will take on the work for free and if it is well received, you will then get paid.

Payment can be a fee, sometimes split into fee and costs. It can also be a royalty, referred to as “points”. An agreement to pay 3 points on dealer price means you get three percent of the money the label gets from the distributor. (Not the value at retail.)

Your initial fee can be recoupable; you won’t get royalties until the amount paid as a fee has been recovered.

This gets very confusing where more than one mix is included and subsequent different formats. Your royalty share will depend on how many other tracks are contained. Other things to beware of are deductions for packaging, TV Ad campaigns and releases in other territories.

Bootlegs are common on the club scene, with many white labels being distributed containing samples. These are illegal, but this is usually only a problem if they start being successful and selling in number. Then the samples must be cleared or replaced, sometimes recreated. A record label may see an opportunity and agree for a release, where they clear the sample and get a hit record. They will only do this for a potential hit.

- » WORKBOOK 7 – COPYRIGHT, LEGAL AND MANAGEMENT
- » WORKBOOK 8 – BUSINESS AND MONEY – CHAPTER3

Clearing a sample before release can be very time consuming and you will certainly have to give away a songwriting share. Permission must be granted by both the writer and the owner of the original sound recording that the sample comes from. To protect labels from possible law suits, remix contracts ask you to give a declaration on sample usage.

