

Question and Answer Summary

How to Successfully Plan a Music Project: Everything You Need to Know!

with Sheri Ptolemy

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Q: Does a person who records the music receive any royalties?

Royalties are complicated, and there are a ton of different royalties. The main two are mastering royalties - where if you own the master, you own that version of the song, whatever has been recorded – and performance royalties.

When you work with a producer, some of them offer to do splits where they won't charge you as much for the recording process, but they will take a percentage of the music royalties at the end. Thankfully, my producer does not request that, and I'm really happy, because I prefer to own 100% of my masters. That's just a personal decision. It might be worthwhile to consider splits, too.

Your producer might ask for splits, but usually whoever pays for the recording owns that. It might be your record label that pays for it, and they own it, or if you are an independent artist and you pay for it, then you own it. So, you get the splits from that, and then there's also the publishing, where you get the splits from whoever wrote it.

For performance royalties, any musicians that play on the song can get a certain amount of performance royalties. It's a very small amount but would be if it's played in public spaces, like, if your song is played at a restaurant, or something like that.

Q: I was imagining what people in community might think if, for example, someone records a traditional song. Would there be different ways that people would go about that?

Yeah, absolutely. That's a really great question and something I've thought about. I put out a song that I wrote called *t̓ilim* which is a love song. I collaborated with a drummer

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who said that it sounds a lot like the wedding song in our area. So, he wanted to play the drum for the wedding song, and then my song was playing as well. That was something I was very stressed about - the protocol around using a traditional song and recording it.

I spoke with many members in the community, just to talk to them about it, and to see if there was an owner for the song because a lot of the songs from the past are passed on, and in time immemorial, continue. I think having the rights go to the owners is really, really important. But basically, there was no owner for this song, and so that part of it is just not getting claimed right now. I'm still sorting out with the community how we're going to manage that part of the song.

Personally, I don't want the royalties for it, I want it to go to the community in some way, and so that is something that has to be case-by-case, following the proper protocols in your community and with your knowledge keepers.

Q: Curious about how you manage the hats of creator and business. Do you divide the day into marketing for four hours, and then creativity for four hours? Do you go so far as to schedule? I find the marketing and sharing of the creative process exhausting and wish I was writing a song instead with all that time!

Yeah, fair enough, me too! I am not that strict about it. I don't divide things half and half, mainly because I don't like to schedule my creativity time. What I do is, I know the tasks for the week that I have to do with my business hat on and I will list them out on the calendar. Then, whatever free time I have after that is for creativity. Sometimes there's none, sometimes I'm doing a 12-hour day of just marketing, and sometimes I'm doing 2 hours, and then I have the rest of the day to do music and I do that. That's just how it works for me. I put out the things that I know I have to get done this day, and then I leave the flexibility for the art to happen as it happens, or for life to happen as it happens.

Host: Thank you for that. I'll be honest, I was a bit overwhelmed with how much that you do. I imagine there are moments where you feel that you just have to be very organized and work, but I like how you shared that you do get discouraged.

For sure, yeah, I think that's why it's so important to have a circle. You share that with others, but then you carry on the next day. Having people who know the artist you, but

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also just you as a person, means then they can support you through those moments. It's definitely challenging and I will say, too, that it changes.

My schedule is different day to day. In the summer, if I'm performing, performing is my priority, and I'm not doing as much admin stuff. But then if I'm getting ready for releases, or I'm recording or editing, I'm doing a lot more admin. So, it does change and evolve, and I guess that's what I like about it - there's seasons for each different aspect and that's changing all the time, which keeps it interesting.

Q: What role does your Samahquam First Nation background and connection to the coastal mountains play in the themes, sound, or overall rootedness of your work?

There's a lot of things I could say here. One thing I want to mention is I do music care programs in Samahquam and that's really important to me. Another thing I want to highlight is there are so many avenues to work as a musician, and they can all be very rewarding.

One of my favorite jobs that I get to do is to work with kids and do music care. If you're not familiar with music care, it's about using music as a tool for emotional regulation and community versus music lessons. I get to do that with preschool kids up to Grade 12s. I do that in Samahquam, which is so fun for me because I get to make music with my cousins, and people that I love. We get to share that together, and that just makes my life so much better. It makes me happy and creates joy in my life, and that bleeds into my creativity.

Another way is, any chance I get, I want to film in our area and showcase the land where I'm from. That is so important to me. I hope to never film a music video inside, because it just feels wrong to me at this point. I just really love showcasing the land that way.

In the music, I mentioned with that song, *tilim*, which had traditional drumming in it from our area. It wasn't Samahquam-specific, but St'átimcets so there's lots of ways. Actually, I'm really excited! I wrote a song with my sister-in-law, and we're going to be singing part of it in the language as well. It naturally tends to happen, the more I practice and the more I'm in touch with everything, it always influences my art.

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Q: How do you balance working and pursuing a career in this field, because it's very difficult. What kind of funding did you need to get started, and are you able to just do this work and not have to work?

I have a few different answers for this. One yes, being an artist is very hard. I have worked a regular 9-to-5 job and it's the idea of having to go back to that that makes me work so hard at this, trying to make this work. The last two years now I've been doing music full-time, and I have a bunch of contract side jobs.

I am grant-funded by First Peoples Cultural Council, so that really helps to pay for all the recording I'm doing and that takes massive pressure off, so I can tour most of the year. Royalties, I'm not really making anything to speak of there yet until the streams start growing. So, most of my income comes from performing live and, hopefully, with the radio play coming in the future, that can be supplemented.

Basically, I just tried to find as many jobs in the creative space that I can, and so I do social media managing for a local business, I do my music care program, and I'm also doing another program in Samahquam. I basically had this rule for myself where if I didn't want to have to go back to a regular 9-to-5, I had to find jobs in the creative space that would work for me and the lifestyle that I want to live.

It's easier said than done, and I definitely considered getting a "real job" again, and I probably will. I've also worked in education, since I have a background in creative writing. I worked as a writing tutor for Capilano University and UBC. So it's always changing, but it is possible. Like I said before in the beginning, but I do live in a tiny house, that I built, and that has really made it possible for me to explore this to this level.

Also, I read something really important in *Big Magic*, which is why I consider getting a more regular job, just even for the winter when I'm not touring. I used to feel that in order to be a successful artist, I had to be working full-time as an artist and not have any other jobs - not work at a cafe or something cliché that artists always end up doing. But then I read that book, and this was something she touched on. It's okay. Your art journey can be this thing that ebbs and flows, and maybe sometimes it will sustain you,

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like in the summer months for touring, but then maybe in the winter you have to get a regular job and that's okay. It doesn't make you any less of an artist. Just trying to find that balance for yourself, and your needs - it's case by case. That's where I'm at, anyway.