

Finding Music For Your Indie Movie

A majority of indie filmmakers, myself included, do not have the flush production budgets to hire a well known music supervisor or professional composer to score their movie. Let alone can we afford to license or pay royalties to top musicians to use their songs or tracks on the soundtrack. I had produced a urban action movie, Consignment, that had a very limited amount of money to spend on music. Turns out after some additional post-production expenses I had even less than expected.

Movies need music. There really is no way to argue against it. Good music adds impact, emotion, and mood to a film. Tarantino has made amazing use of music in his films. Many viewers have commented that the music is like a character itself.

I was faced with the choices of putting the completion of Consignment on hold indefinitely until more money could be raised for the soundtrack or trying to find quality music that I could get for free or as close to free as possible. Not wanting to put the movie on hold I set out to shake some trees for music that moved me. It was a gamble I hoped would work.

I checked out some companies on the internet selling royalty free music in all types of genres from rock & roll to world beat for very affordable prices. Type 'royalty free music' into a search engine to listen and shop around. I listened to tons of sample tracks. Most didn't fit the feel of the urban action movie Consignment. A few tracks I did like were out my budget.

A cool thing I did discover is there are some filmmaker friendly sites that will allow you to download free original music to use in your movie. All they ask is that you properly credit the creators behind the music. Sonny Boo offers this on his website. I did not end up using the free downloads, but I think it's good karma they put it out there.

The anxiety and stress of not finding the right music was becoming a mental drain. Nothing worse than the thought of your movie not getting done. I decided to try a different approach to getting the soundtrack squared away. I was going to contact independent bands, artists, and musicians directly with the chance to get exposure on a independent films soundtrack. Indie artists from the music and movie arena collaborating sounded like a win-win.

There's many places to find independent artists and record labels looking to get their music heard. What better way than to be featured on a movie soundtrack? I religiously set aside hours everyday to listen to music from up and coming artists. After I had a narrowed down list of the tracks I wanted to use on Consignment I tracked down these artists and record labels contact information.

My independent music campaign was launched. I emailed, phoned, and faxed my pitch to the people on my list. I was excited about adding music I believed would add tremendously to the overall viewing experience of the movie. It was a tougher sell than I thought to get independent artists and record labels to contribute to an indie movie soundtrack.

My pitch was truthful about only offering credit for their music. My advice is not to BS people. Be upfront. I let them know this was a indie movie without big names or a Hollywood budget.

Here's the rundown of how it played out for me using this approach. I was able to land the music of two artists I felt was perfect. Another artist was interested, but was honest enough to voice their concerns about not knowing how the movie would look when it was done and decided not to contribute to the soundtrack. After Consignment was done I sent them a DVD. They liked it and agreed to compose an original track for my next movie for free.

Most of the record labels ignored my requests or said no money meant no go. I respect that. One record label representative took the time to speak with me at length and made a point that stuck with me. He basically said until you have a name or a movie you've done to show your work people will be skeptical about lending their music to your indie movie. There not against cross-promotion and exposure. There against being associated with terrible movie and bad exposure. That made a lot of sense.

With a few tracks secured that I liked I decided to go directly to the people to find the rest of the music. Consignment being a urban action movie I wanted some hot hip hop tracks. I started hitting websites that had hip hop forums where people could list links to their demos, post beats, and battle other hip hop artists. I posted open calls for artists to submit their tracks for an urban movie.

I got a huge response, but it was chaotic dealing with the amount of tracks that came in. Plus their were obvious copyright infringements and looping done by some contributors. Last thing you want is music on your movie that causes legal problems for your movies release when you sign on with a distributor. I wasn't making a bootleg underground movie to sell out of the trunk of my car. I was going for mainstream rental and retail outlets. I took the time to get all the releases, clearances, and paper work on the movie. I was going to do the same for the music.

After seeing my post I was contacted by the fellas at Jackin4Beats.Com about helping me out. They streamlined and organized the submission process. They posted calls for music on their website for free. Their efforts increased the quality of the submissions ten fold. They only forwarded me tracks that were free and clear to use on the soundtrack with no legal worries. All music clearance forms were signed on the dotted line.

The buzz was there. Next a rising independent music label specializing in West Coast hip hop wanted to be on the soundtrack. They headed into the studio with the synopsis of the movie and cut an original track with the same name as the movie. This song brought and hit hard. I used it on the opening and closing credits of the film. Then I got some tracks from some emerging East Coast rappers with a latin edge that put the soundtrack over the top. These talented artists music rounded out the soundtrack. They understood it's about exposure.

I wanted to touch on my experience and they way I got the movie soundtrack done. There's a lot of avenues for you to land the right music for your movie. Obviously the more money the more choices, but money doesn't have to cut you at the knees making you put bad music on your movie.

There's talented artists and upstart record labels in the same boat as you grinding it out to make in the entertainment business. Everyone is looking for a break. Sometimes you can get it together to make it work and sometimes you can't. Just keep fighting to get what you want. Never settle for music you hate for the sake of completing your movie. You will regret the end product. It won't be easy to secure music you love, but isn't your movie worth the effort? You're damn right it is.

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