

RELEASING YOUR MUSIC

From Mix to Global Stage

MC's: Sophie Janusko (SYN FM) & Yalli

Panellists: Jordan Acker (Ivy Music Group), Jordanne Chant (Dinosaur City Records), Jackson Phelan (Artist)

Overview

The final Soundcheck panel tackled the journey from finished demo to released record: recording standards, distribution mechanics, royalty collection, release timelines, music ownership, and the place of physical media.

With perspectives from a label founder, a music manager, and a working artist, the panel demystified what is often the most intimidating part of the DIY music process. The core message: get your ducks in a row, have the ownership conversation early, and don't let fear of the technical stop you from releasing.





KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. RECORDING QUALITY: HOW GOOD DOES IT NEED TO BE?

Jordan Acker set the baseline: "Getting your song mixed and mixed relatively well is super important." But he immediately addressed the cost barrier: "The music industry is so great - you can tap into communities like people studying music production who actually need to provide a mix or a master for their portfolios. It's like, 'Hey, I have an unmixed song that really needs help - if you can help me, you can use it towards your portfolio.'"

Jackson Phelan offered a counter-perspective using Alex G as an example: "He got his start making records in his house with a \$30 USB microphone into GarageBand and uploading them to Bandcamp. Most of the music that is really popular by him is still the music he made on GarageBand as a teenager."

Jordanne Chant reinforced this from her label experience: "A lot of the artists I release, it was their first ever single or album. Hubcap, for example, did it all on GarageBand just using the keyboard, not even any instruments. And that got picked up by some big Spotify playlists."

Key nuance from Jackson: "It's cool to just commit to the DIY approach and bring people along the journey. It's very hard to go back - if you spend thousands on your first recording in an amazing studio, your quality will be much lower if you switch to DIY after."

The panel agreed: quality standards are genre-dependent. Lo-fi and bedroom production is trending and can be a deliberate aesthetic choice. Yalli confirmed: "We got a very large production budget, but it's a choice for us to produce in the bedroom because we like the sound."

2. APRA AMCOS: THE STEP EVERYONE SKIPS

Jordan Acker was passionate about this: "The most important step is actually just doing it. A lot of artists just seem to put that behind them and pretend it doesn't exist because it does look and sound scary."

He outlined the essentials:

- Register with APRA AMCOS
- Ensure publishing and writing splits are correct and agreed upon
- Make sure APRA AMCOS records match the label copy uploaded to distributors
- Even small spelling errors can affect royalty payments



The panel's biggest revelation - Live Performance Reports:

Jackson: "A live performance report is something you can do when you play a gig - after you finish, you upload your set list, and then you can receive royalties for playing your own music. All the live venues pay a licensing fee."

He shared a personal story: "I remember the first year we did it, and I was a broke uni student. The payment came through and it was like two thousand dollars. We were not a big band at that time, and I was shocked and felt really dumb that I had not been doing it prior."

Jordan confirmed: "Often more than streaming" - live performance royalties can exceed streaming income for emerging artists.

3. DISTRIBUTION: GETTING YOUR MUSIC ON PLATFORMS

Jordan explained the basics: "You yourself can't just create a Spotify account or an Apple Music account and upload directly. It has to go through a third party."

Common distributors mentioned:

- DistroKid
- TuneCore
- CD Baby
- Gyro (Australian)
- Ditto (has Australian office)

Two pricing models:

1. Flat annual fee (e.g., ~\$12/year) - you keep all royalties
2. Percentage of royalties - the distributor takes a cut but may offer additional services like Spotify playlist pitching, PR, and marketing

Warning from Jordanne: "Some distributors don't want to take on single artists unless they can see they're already making money."

Critical warning about flat-fee distribution: Jordanne shared that if your bank details change or you're not monitoring your account, your music can go offline entirely. "Once your music goes off, even if you re-upload it, you're not getting back on any personal playlists or any big playlists."

Alternative platforms: Bandcamp and SoundCloud allow direct uploads with 100% distribution rights retained. These can coexist with traditional distribution.



4. THE RELEASE TIMELINE

Jordan's recommended minimum: 4 weeks before release to have everything ready - content, press materials, show bookings, radio pitches, all assets finalised.

Jackson's recommended ideal: 3 months preparation time. "It all takes longer than you think. If you make a film clip with your friend and they have to edit it and they get really busy, that's going to take longer."

Jackson's strategic advice: "Stay a release or two ahead of where you're at now. Imagine something really great happens and you're getting all this buzz and you're really sweating to complete more music. That can be really stressful."

The flexibility benefit: Jordan shared the story of artist Lucy Sugarman, who had everything prepared for an October release. When a support tour offer came in with two and a half weeks' notice, they were able to move the release date forward by six weeks: "That was just solely based on pre-planning and organisation. It was as simple as clicking a date change in the back end."

Jordanne's pro tip: Pre-upload releases with a date far in advance so everything is ready to go, allowing you to pull the trigger when the right moment arrives.

5. Music Ownership and Splits

Jordan: "It's all about having those discussions as early as you can when it comes to who owns what part of the song. The further down the line you get, the less you're talking about splits, the more difficult that conversation becomes."

Jackson offered a memorable warning: "It's famously the band splitter - when a song blows up and one person is very rich and the other people are not."

Practical advice:

- Discuss splits in the first session
- Take notes on who contributed what
- Don't assume anything - ask questions even if you feel embarrassed
- Get agreements on paper, even informal ones
- If collaborating for free / mates rates, be especially clear about expectations, scope, and timelines

Jackson: "Don't assume that because you don't know something, you're an idiot. Nobody really knows. Just ask all of those questions when you're working with people."



Jordanne: "Communicating clearly, having it written on paper, and if you don't totally understand what your agreement is - especially with contracts - get other people to look over it."

On free collaborations: Jackson warned that accepting free production work can create awkward dynamics: "Sometimes it's worthwhile actually being really clear and trying to pay people, even if you don't have much money, because then you're in a position where you can actually ask for your needs to be met."

6. PHYSICAL MEDIA: VERY MUCH ALIVE

The panel was unanimous: physical media is back and thriving.

Jordan: "It's so back. The idea of being able to collect it and have it in your hands is so important." He shared the example of Holly Hebe, who burns her own CDs: "It takes Holly half an hour to burn 15 CDs. We play little games - hide the CDs around the venue before we play."

Options discussed:

- Vinyl - expensive but the gold standard for collectors
- CDs - cheap to produce, can be burned at home
- Cassettes - have resurged strongly

Jackson's story: "I saw Christian Bryant supporting Phoebe Bridgers. He had burnt CDs of his first single that hadn't come out yet. It was like, cool, we can buy a song that doesn't exist anywhere yet. That actually put him in a spot in my world as a fan."

Sophie (MC): "When you've got a vinyl and you bring it to someone and say, 'Can you sign this?' - it's always, 'Yes, I'd love to. That's amazing. You've got my stuff.' The support is the best way to show your support."

7. WHAT LABELS AND MANAGERS LOOK FOR

Jordan: "I'm big on the vibe. My relationship with the artist is super important. If we can get a coffee and not talk about music, that's really important and really undervalued."

Jackson identified the most attractive quality in an artist: "A really clear idea of who they are." He added pragmatically: "Don't be loose. If someone sends you an email, respond. Be on time for meetings. If you make it difficult for people to work with you, unless your music is really, really stand-out, they probably won't work with you."

Jordanne: "Having a good working relationship, not rushing into agreements, and making sure you mesh well. Communicating clearly what is actually possible and being realistic."



AUDIENCE Q&A HIGHLIGHTS

Q: Is there a place for physical media?

Unanimous yes. Options range from burnt CDs (nearly free) to vinyl (expensive but valued). Physical media creates tangible fan connection, can be sold at shows, and puts money directly in the artist's pocket.

Q: Can I release music without a distributor?

Yes - Bandcamp and SoundCloud allow direct uploads. You can maintain 100% distribution rights. Some artists use both approaches, putting overflow material on Bandcamp while formal releases go through distributors.



ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE IMMEDIATELY

1. Register with APRA AMCOS today. It's free, and it protects your future royalties.
2. File a Live Performance Report after every gig. Upload your set list to APRA - you may be entitled to meaningful royalties you're currently missing.
3. Choose a distributor and upload your music. DistroKid, TuneCore, CD Baby, Gyro, and Ditto are all options. Some cost as little as \$12/year.
4. Discuss songwriting splits with every collaborator before you start working, not after.
5. Build a press kit with: masters, lyrics, credits, bio, high-quality photos, and any video content. Keep it in a shared folder, ready to send.
6. Plan releases 4 weeks minimum (ideally 3 months) in advance. Have content, assets, and press materials ready before you set a date.
7. Stay one or two releases ahead. Keep writing and recording so you have material ready when momentum builds.
8. Pre-upload to your distributor with a far-future date so you can pull the release forward if an opportunity arises.
9. Burn CDs or make cassettes for your next show. Physical media creates fan connection and generates direct income.
10. Tap into student/emerging producers for mixing and mastering. Offer them portfolio credit in exchange for affordable rates.
11. Upload every release to Triple J Unearthed and AMRAP (carried over from Panel 2 but reinforced here).
12. Send music to community radio with a complete package - bio, photos, upcoming shows, and a personal note.

PANELLIST ADVICE SUMMARY

Jordan Acker

Register with APRA, file live performance reports, have all ducks in a row 4 weeks out. Pre-planning enables flexibility. Vibe matters in artist relationships.

Jordanne Chant

Lo-fi and bedroom production is valid and trending. Communicate clearly about expectations and agreements. Stay on top of distributor admin. Physical media is very much alive.

Jackson Phelan

Quality is genre-dependent - commit to your approach. Stay ahead on releases. Discuss splits early. Pay collaborators if you can. Have a clear identity. Be professional and responsive. |



STAY IN TOUCH

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