

How To Get Better Reviews

By Gian Fiero

In this day and age of independence it's only logical to question the importance of getting your music reviewed. After all, since fewer artists are getting record deals - forcing them to become entrepreneurs - why would you need a "critic" to validate the artistic or commercial merit of your music?

Well, since I am one of those critics, I decided to write an article on how important it is to continue to get your music reviewed - even though you may be enjoying popularity achieved through word of mouth and consistent CD sales.

It's true that websites enable music artists to create communities for their existing fans, but good reviews can be used to introduce your talent and product to new audiences and persuade them to buy your CD or pay to attend your shows. Please note that I said a *good* review.

How can you accomplish that? That's the real question, and one that I will answer in this article, but first, a little statistical data from my own personal history as a critic for Muse's Muse.

Since I started writing reviews for Muse's Muse in 2002, I have received about 1,200 CDs, which averages out to 50 per month, and 600 per year. As of this writing, I have only reviewed about 50 CDs, for an average of 12 CDs per year, or 1 CD per month.

Question: Do you know the average number of artists that get signed per year by major labels? Answer: 4. The competition is fierce at the top; thus the criteria for my reviews and my position that if you make music with professional or commercial intentions, it should meet certain standards.

What artists should ask themselves before distributing their projects



to anyone in the industry (or sending it to me for a review) is this: "Does the quality of my CD compare to the songs that my friends like and buy?" In essence, can it compete? If you can't answer those questions honestly, a negative review should be your wake-up call.

My policy is not to review CDs that are lacking in quality (talent, songwriting, technical, commercial, etc.) because a bad review is of no use to you, and a waste of time for me. I keep it positive and I keep it real. I know what music the industry (music, radio, television, and film) embraces and it's my objective to help them find it through my work as a music critic.

The following helpful hints will help you increase your chances for getting good

reviews by any music critic with any publication.

1. Have good songs.

Much easier said than done, but isn't this the goal? Collaborate with people that are more experienced than you. If you are a singer, set your ego aside and get (or cover) songs that allow you to showcase the strength of your vocal talents.

2. Send your CD with a cover letter.

The cover letter should contain some personal info about you, your musical history, and your objectives. You get bonus points if you state the reason why you chose the particular reviewer to critique your project. It shows that you have done research. Fact: 99% of the CDs I have reviewed were accompanied by a cover letter. Advice: DO NOT make excuses about your songs or your recordings in your cover letter. Your project should speak for itself.

3. Pay attention to your packaging.

You can't judge a book by its cover, but the cover does give you an indication of what's inside. Usually, a poorly packaged CD is poorly produced. Take pride in all aspects of your work! Don't limit your creativity to your music.

4. Don't send reviews that you have already received.

What's up with that? I don't care what other critics had to say about a project that I'm about to review! Keep those reviews to yourself and compare notes. Once you've gotten multiple reviews, choose the best one(s) to use in your press kit or on your website.

5. Distinguish yourself.

Send a t-shirt of your band, a calendar, a key chain, etc. These are not freebies or payola; they are promotional items and I use every one that gets sent to me.

Good luck!