

A FIELD GUIDE

The Remote Direction Playbook

How to brief, direct and finish work with session musicians you may never meet in person.

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What this is

You can hire a violinist in Canada, a cellist in Portugal, a pianist in Costa Rica and a mastering engineer in the United States, book all four inside a week, and get real work back. That part is solved — platforms exist, the rosters are real, and the audio comes back clean.

The unsolved part is direction. You meet the musician on camera, for the length of a session. Video-call audio carries latency, so you can't play or sing along in real time and expect it to land in sync — that alone rules out some of the most direct ways to show someone a part. What's left is what you can say, what you send ahead, and how precisely you can describe what you want.

This document is what I learned filling that gap. Over three months I ran remote sessions on Musiversal at four to five a week, funded by Arts Council England as research and development. Some of those sessions produced parts I could not have written. Some produced nothing I could use. This is the record of which was which, and why.

I am not a famous producer and this is not a masterclass. I am a self-taught musician working from a bedroom studio in London who received a grant to research whether remote session work — for people working the way I work — is a serious option. The short answer is yes. The long answer is nuanced.

Who it is for

Producers working alone, on a small budget, who want live players on their records and have assumed that was for other people.

You don't have to be able to read music fluently or be able to afford a day studio, or have any experience directing a professional musician before to be able to make the most of remote sessions. I had all of those limitations at the start of the project and none of them prevented me from having an incredible experience.

It will also be useful if you already book remote sessions and find the results inconsistent. You may find the answer you are looking for in the insights from my experiences.

How to use it

Read it end to end once. It runs in the order the work happens, from conceptualising the work before it happens through to what you owe the musician after the files land. After that, use it as reference.

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Sections 3, 6 and 10 are the ones I would read first if someone handed me this document at the start of the project.

SECTION 1

Before the session

Most of a remote session is decided before it starts. The strongest predictor of whether a session goes well is how ready the track was when you booked. It outranks which musician you booked.

Try the platform before you pay for it

Musiversal lets you join as a non-paying member. Do that first. Sit in on the free group calls, get a feel for who is on the roster and how they work. I picked up a \$1 first-month code at the end of one of those calls, which meant I saw the whole operation from the inside before committing real money.

The subscription is billed as unlimited, but in practice it is capped at four sessions in progress at once — a slot does not free up until you have run one of your existing four. In your first month you also get “fast lane” bookings: short-notice slots that open up when someone cancels or a musician suddenly has availability. You can pay separately for these outside the first month, but in month one they are free, and always worth taking.

I would recommend spending a full month on the platform before you subscribe — not just the trial call, but long enough to know the roster, decide which musicians you would book first, and know which song you would run through them. That way, the moment paid time starts, you are booking immediately rather than losing days to deciding. If starting something new tends to make you anxious or prone to procrastinating, deal with that before the clock starts too — it is a cost you can avoid.

Remote session work is a trial-and-error craft. Start the trial before the subscription clock starts.

Book with a plan, or book to experiment

Book with a specific target in mind if you have one — a score, an exact line you want played. That is a valid, direct way to work. But going in with no fixed expectation is equally valid, and sometimes produced better material than the targeted approach. Treat the session as an experiment: you might get something you use, you might not, and that is fine either way. The skill is not picking one mode over the other — it is being genuinely at peace with whatever the open approach gives you.

Send a working mix

Prepare your mixes as best you can in advance. The closer the track is to finished, the better the musician can hear how their part will sit inside it.

Put yourself in the musician’s shoes: a track that already sounds good is more likely to prompt a better performance and a better-written part, because they can hear where their part actually goes. That does not mean an unfinished mix gets a bad part — it means full

preparation to the best of your ability maximises the odds of prompting the musician's best performance.

Have the harmonic structure ready

Even if you do not read music well yourself, the musician needs to know the harmony. Three options, in ascending order of effort:

Plain text in the brief. *Gmaj7(13) – C#min7 – Bsus4add6 – Em9(11), repeating throughout.* I covered an entire violin session this way, because the song has one repeating progression and the player reads symbolic chord notation fluently. Free, instant, and adequate more often than you would expect.

A generated chart. AI tools can turn a hand-written chord structure into a formatted chart, but treat this with caution — even simple requests often need several rounds of correction, and you cannot verify the result if you do not read fluently yourself. Section 9 has the full picture, including where this goes wrong.

Notation software. MuseScore is free and produces real charts. I learned it during the project after chart quality came up repeatedly with players, and it closed the problem for good. The learning curve is steep for a week and then it is a tool you own.

Live or async

You choose which of a player's available sessions you want to book, and indicate in advance whether you attend a session or send only a brief. Bear in mind that time zones may force your hand when it comes to whether you can attend or not. Musicians live everywhere — South Korea, Costa Rica, the US — and their morning can be your evening, or a musician you specifically want may only be working in what's the middle of the night your time. In those cases, unless you're willing to stay up, you choose not to attend and send a brief instead — and when that's the choice, the real responsibility shifts to doing everything you can in that brief to set the musician up for their best take, since you won't be there live to re-direct.

- Want to react to the musician's choices while they are making them? Live.
- Trust the musician to write their own part? Either works.
- Complex part needing several passes? Live.
- Want to be surprised? You can be surprised in every session, async or live.

One practical consequence: Musiversal musicians only record sessions you are present for. If you want session footage for content, you have to be there.

Two booking realities

Slots disappear fast. Sessions with the best musicians book out quickly. If you see a slot you want, take it immediately. I missed out on booking sessions that I wanted within five minutes because I thought, "Oh, let me just quickly check if there's not another session that I want to book more." By the time I got back to the page, the session was gone. If the track is

not quite finished, still book. The track can catch up to the booking; the booking will not wait for the track. A booked session is also a deadline, and deadlines finish tracks.

Your next slot opens the moment this one ends. Be prepared for the end of your session with ideas of who you might want to book for your next session. As soon as your session ends, the booking slot frees up and you can book your next session. If you have your next session or a selection of options in mind, ready to book, you will maximise your total bookings and value over the month. If you don't prepare, at the end of a late night session it's easy to put off searching through the available roster until the next morning — by which time another time zone with active musicians has been working and booking for 8 hours. Result: you wake up and your favourite musician is not available for a few more days, or even a week.

The real constraint isn't booking sessions quickly, it's the production time in between them. If you're working to a fixed window — a month, or however long you choose to subscribe for — get as much of the process ready in advance as you can, so each session can start the moment it's booked rather than waiting on you. If you book a cello session, get the files back, and need to produce them — comp the takes, sit them in the track — before you're ready to send that updated track on to the next musician, you need real working hours in the days between sessions to do that. Pack a month too tightly with back-to-back bookings and you'll have session material piling up faster than you can use it.

Cancellations are usually infrastructure, not flakiness. Some of the roster work from regions where power cuts, internet outages and storms are ordinary. Build enough slack that a cancelled session is an inconvenience rather than a crisis, and book anything on your critical path earlier than you think you need to.

SECTION 2

The brief

For in-person sessions, a brief is optional. On an async session, the brief makes or break it.

Musicians on the platform work with people of every ability level, and have real experience interpreting intentions and desires from whatever you give them. You don't need to worry about failing to communicate at some level you imagine you're supposed to reach — communicate from wherever your own level actually is, and that's enough.

Specific or open — both are valid

If you know what you want, be as specific as you can. If you don't know what you want, that's good too. Let the musician lead, and you will often be surprised and elated with what comes back. Oftentimes, what another musician can come up with is something that you would never have been able to conceptualise or imagine yourself, and you will enjoy it much more than anything you could have made or thought of yourself.

Lock the parameters, lift everything else

Be clear about what is fixed and what is open. For example: fixed - the chord changes, the tempo, the key. Open: what to play, when to play it, how many notes, whether to play the whole song or one section — but only when the musician you have booked actually wants that freedom. Section 3 covers how to tell whether the musician in front of you is a composer type or a reader type, and that distinction decides whether “everything else is yours” is a gift or a burden.

Let yourself be uncertain in writing

If you do not yet know what the part should be, say so. Something along these lines will let the musician know that there aren't constraints and they have permission to be creative:

*I'm not sure exactly what I'm looking for. The arrangement is busy and I think strings might help.
I'd love to hear what you'd do.*

End warm

“Have fun with it. Thanks in advance!” It's always good to be positive.

SECTION 3

Casting

Here is the finding I would most want handed to me at the start:

Not every session musician wants an open brief.

Roughly half of the musicians I worked with loved having the autonomy to write their own parts. They're composers as much as they're players. They want to bring their own ideas, and an open brief energises them.

The other half would prefer you to provide a chart or a score. You tell them in advance what they need to play, and then they use their creativity to elevate that material. Oftentimes in the classical music world, for example, creativity is directed at interpretation. Take a piece by Mozart, which has been played by many people — the notes are set on the page, but each performance is different because different sets of musicians interpret the music in unique ways. They phrase things slightly differently; they feel and inject emotion in different ways.

Some musicians are trained to provide that quality to the music, and it's up to us as the producer to identify which kind of musician is in front of you and to match your intentions for the session to the musician whose qualities and desires align with what you're looking for, so there is a meeting of people who can satisfy each other.

Want someone to play your exact part with emotion and nuance? Choose a "reader type". Want someone to come up with brand new parts? You want a "composer type".

How to tell which you have

Read the portfolio. Sometimes it tells you — own compositions, own arrangements, writing credits point toward a composer type; working entirely as a performer on other people's material points toward a reader type. More often than not, though, the profile will not indicate clearly which they prefer. The only real way to know in advance is to ask, or do one session and find out.

The clearest signal I ever got didn't come from a profile — it came from doing sessions and paying attention.

Ask when you book. *Do you prefer a chart, or are you happy to bring your own ideas?* One question, one avoided frustration.

Ask the by-ear question separately. Some musicians are entirely capable of working a part out by ear, and will still decline to work that way as a matter of professional standard. I have watched a player do it fast and well inside a session but through their actions understand that doing that isn't really part of the service they are comfortable offering. So message first and ask: *If I don't have a chart, are you happy to work parts out by ear from the track?* No answer is an answer too. This is a service-fit question, not a character question, and finding out before the session is free.

Why casting is a budget decision

Here is the arithmetic that makes this section matter more than it looks.

If you cannot produce professional charts yourself, a reader-type musician effectively requires a transcription service. Musiversal offers one, and when I checked, availability ran on a roughly two week lead time. It typically takes another few days for them to send back the finished transcription after that. That turns the transcription service into the bottleneck on your entire schedule. Routed through it, my realistic throughput would have dropped from fourteen to eighteen sessions a month down to about eight. Same subscription, half the output.

Matching yourself to composer-type musicians is therefore not a personality preference. For a producer who does not write notation fluently, it is the difference between the platform being exceptional value and marginal value.

The same arithmetic applies to the roster's most in-demand players. The best book out fourteen to twenty-five days ahead. Build your workflow around them exclusively and you are locked to four to eight sessions a month. Sessions run thirty minutes, so that is two to four hours of playing for a subscription of about £200, or roughly £50 to £100 an hour. That is close to what hiring a session player directly in the UK costs. It is a reasonable price, and it erases the affordability advantage that made the platform worth using in the first place.

The value lives in the mix: a few in-demand favourites, plus available players you have vetted yourself. Waiting for the best is sometimes the right trade. Make it knowingly.

Vetting: book one, maybe two, never three

A profile tells you less than you would hope. Book a single session with any musician you have not worked with, and treat it as an audition running in both directions. If it is good, book more. If it is not, one more at most, because everyone has off days and sometimes the wrong fit is your song rather than their playing.

Never pre-book a run with someone you have not heard on your own material. I learned this the expensive way.

Adapting the brief to the type

COMPOSER-TYPE	READER-TYPE
Open brief, problem stated	Specified brief, part stated
Chord chart is enough	Notation, or close to it
Permission language does real work	Permission language is redundant
Multiple takes to explore	Multiple takes for variation

Get the casting right and the brief mostly writes itself.

SECTION 4

By instrument and service

What follows isn't a complete guide to every instrument — it's a handful of specific things worth knowing, drawn from a selection of the sessions I ran. Where I don't have anything real to say about a family, I've left it out. Not all instruments were equally available during my time on the platform, which has influenced how I weighted my sessions and what I learned the most about.

Strings

Strings were my favourite family of instruments to work with. The string players I worked with were, across the board, wonderful. I much prefer the nuance and complexity a real string player brings over programming MIDI strings with a library like Spitfire Audio for example (although I love their libraries, especially their free LABS ones, though these are sadly now deprecated and no longer supported).

Getting programmed strings to sound realistic rather than obviously in-the-box is its own particular skill, one I haven't mastered yet. I have spent time and paid upfront for some of the mid tier libraries but not yet the premier libraries which can run into the hundreds or thousands of pounds per library. Perhaps those libraries close the gap on sample quality. However, I can't imagine that they can replace the experience of directly working with musicians, getting back string parts that are genuinely unique and creative and that I really couldn't have imagined creating myself, and so real string players win hands down for me there.

One violinist told me they prefer songs in the keys of E, A, D or G. This preference exists because these keys let violinists, violists and cellists use open strings, which produce a more resonant, secure and brighter sound. Flat keys often need more complex fingering and string muting to manage unwanted dissonance from neighbouring strings.

Drums

The one drum session I ran with a highly in-demand player was excellent. A few sessions with more readily available drummers didn't give me material I ended up using. I don't have the vocabulary drummers use to redirect that kind of thing in real time, which didn't help, though vocabulary alone wouldn't have solved everything.

I still love using samples — they give you a huge number of ideas to build from, ready-made building blocks I'll keep reaching for regardless. Remote sessions don't clearly beat samples for me the way they do for strings and mastering; each has its place. If I book drums again, I'd probably wait and pay for one of the more in-demand players rather than book more widely available ones — though I didn't try every drummer on the roster, and there may well be ones I'd have loved working with.

Mixing

A remote mixing engineer can be a rescue operation rather than a polish step. I sent an engineer a song I had made twelve years earlier and never finished. It came back alive in a way I am not capable of producing myself.

That song only had four tracks, which is why a single half-hour “quick mix” session covered it. A more typical song needs several tracks worth of attention, which means several sessions — potentially spread over days or weeks depending on the mixer’s availability, if you want to stick with the same person throughout. If you have a graveyard of nearly-finished tracks that are similarly simple, a mixing session is genuinely high value. For anything bigger, weigh that against the full-mix service instead.

A half-hour session covers a “quick mix” of a few tracks only — you cannot send a whole multitrack song and expect it back in that time. A full mix costs extra, roughly \$200, essentially the standard market full-mix rate, on top of the subscription.

Mastering

Mastering as a finishing mechanism. This is the strongest thing I learned. I’m strong through most of a track and weak on the closing stretch — the administrative work of actually finishing it. Booking a mastering session converts that final stretch into two things I could not easily give myself:

1. **A deadline.** The booked session forces the mix to a deliverable state by a fixed date.
2. **Verification.** Another professional listens and tells you it sounds good. That outside sign-off is what finally lets you call a song finished rather than permanently almost-finished.

I found mastering to be a genuinely collaborative session, with ideas flowing freely back and forth between myself and the engineer. Their input was often exactly what the mix needed — pushing back on choices I’d made, and helping me identify places I needed to go back and improve. It doubled as the most high-value, iterative part of the whole subscription, almost like an educational crash course: having someone listen, give feedback, and suggest concrete things to try — adding reverb to a snare, say — and discuss the creative decisions together was genuinely valuable. A trained, professional set of ears is also a useful barometer for where you actually are in your own mixing journey — someone who can tell you what gap still needs closing.

SECTION 5

The live session

Your voice is the chart

The most useful discovery of the whole project, and the one I would most want a beginner to hear: **you do not need a usable chart to run an excellent live session.** You need a musician who will work by ear, which Section 3 tells you how to find, and the willingness to direct imperfectly with the theory you actually have.

A cello session late in the project settled this. My chart was, honestly, close to unusable. The session was excellent anyway, because of two things.

Move one: sing the line. If you can hear the part in your head, you can hum it. Contour and rhythm are what the musician needs, and a professional will translate a sung shape onto their instrument faster than they will parse a bad chart. The written equivalent, for async work, is to bounce an isolated track of the line you want doubled or answered.

To do this accurately, you need to clap the beat along with the singing — or count out loud — so the musician knows where you are in the bar. It doesn't come easily, and it doesn't work every time. There's also a real technical limitation: latency between you singing and the musician hearing you over a video call. You can't play the track and sing along to it simultaneously and expect it to land in sync for them — that specific approach doesn't work.

Move two: react to what they just played. Anchor direction to their material rather than to abstract instruction. *I liked that part you did. Could you do it again, but reverse the arpeggio on the last time round?* That kind of direction needs only the vocabulary you already have, it tells the musician exactly what to keep, and it turns the session into a fast call-and-response loop. Some of the best parts on the project came out of that loop, lines I could never have briefed because they did not exist until the cellist played the first version of them.

If you believe that session musicians are only for professionals and you can only engage them if you can produce notation — I found the opposite to be true. For sure, at times you may feel the limitations of your knowledge and ability to communicate what you want or how you want them to play. But this skill, and the confidence to simply arrive with what you do know, does arrive much sooner than you might expect. If you're already full of confidence, then you're sure to have a great time!

Comping live takes

Treat multiple takes of the same part as raw material for one performance that does not exist yet, rather than as three options to pick between.

Splice for continuity, not only for quality. Where you join two takes matters as much as which takes you picked. It works like editing speech — cut mid-sentence into a different sentence and it sounds disjointed. The join does not need the same notes or the same

register. It needs to sound like it could believably be the same person still playing. Crossfade at the ends of phrases, between notes — never within a sustained note itself.

From disparate parts that, on their own, you wouldn't want to keep as one take — by choosing small sections, your favourite parts of each take, you can create a collage effect that has the feel of one take. It requires careful editing of the volumes to make everything sound consistent. But my experience was that taking as much material as possible gives you the greatest amount of freedom and creative room in production, to fashion something from the material you do have.

Notes for running the session

- Have your chart to hand so you can follow bar lines and direct by number — “*go back to bar thirteen, let's try something around the G major chord*” — and keep your reference tracks bookmarked.
- During a take, it's a bit of a juggling act — you're listening and mentally planning at once, because something early in a take might be exactly what prompts your next direction. There's no one right approach: you can interrupt immediately when something stands out, or let the take run all the way through. With a composer-type musician especially, my actual recommendation is to get out of the way as much as possible — let them roll, stay in their own creative space, and you'll capture their genuine personal contribution. Occasionally inserting yourself has real value too, but the lean should be toward restraint.

Separately: the bounce has to be uploaded well before the session starts — at minimum one hour ahead, and Musiversal recommends twenty-four hours. This is done and finished long before you sit down to open the call, not something to prepare in the moment.

SECTION 6

Precision

Through the process of encountering tuning and timing errors, I concluded that the best trade was to focus sessions on creative takes and to fix any tuning and timing errors afterwards myself.

What a redo actually costs

Sessions are thirty minutes. Inside that window I am optimising for volume and breadth: as many different ideas as the musician can produce.

When a take was improvised, “play that again” is not a small request. The musician has to stop, listen back, work out what they actually played, relearn it, and then reproduce it on demand. That moves them out of a free creative mode and into a mechanical self-correcting one. It costs session time that could have produced a new idea, and it changes the quality of everything they play afterwards.

The job in the room

My read on my own role in a thirty-minute improvised session is to protect the container. Keep it free and easygoing, keep the musician’s attention on making things up rather than on critiquing their own technique. Picking at intonation moves a session from imaginative to analytical, which works directly against what I am paying for.

So the trade is explicit: protect the session’s creative breadth, and pay for it afterwards in my own hours with time-alignment and pitch correction. Breadth and freshness of material is what I am optimising for, and this is what it costs.

If you would rather have fewer, cleaner takes and less post-production, that is an entirely sound decision too — it’s up to you. Both are valid.

Giving up control of a session is the thing that produces parts you could not have written.

SECTION 7

After the session

The session ends and you have audio.

A couple of principles for the material

When a take does not fit, do not force it. Beautiful playing over the wrong section is still wrong. Cutting it in because you have it does not add to the song, it dilutes the parts that do work.

When a take contains a moment, extract it. A phrase, a bar, a transition. The musician handed you something you did not know you needed. Recognising it, isolating it and building around it is where the most distinctive sounds in your tracks will come from.

Arrangement consequences

Sometimes you may find that you get a bunch of takes which you like, which now end up becoming the centrepiece of your track, or they are fighting for the same space as tracks that you yourself have previously recorded, which are now threatening to clutter up the mix.

This presents its own challenge of how to decide which bits you're going to keep and which bits you're going to cut — and sometimes you're going to have to cut or bury your own parts in the mix, parts that you previously loved, but which the mix no longer has enough room to accommodate.

On “Let's Take A Trip” the piano displaced the classical guitar that the whole song had been written on. That guitar part was the seed of everything. I did not want to lose it, so I did not remove it. I spent a long time finding a level where it is still present, felt more than heard, no longer competing with the piano for the same space.

Burying a part counts as giving the new part room. Deleting it is not the only option. Remember, the song is the priority, not individual parts (although they are important).

SECTION 8

Crediting and rights

This section describes Musiversal specifically, because that is the platform I used. If you are on a different one, the principles will carry and the specifics will not. Check your own terms.

The credit format

Instrument/Service – Artist Name (via Musiversal)

For example: *Mastering – Luciano Vassão (via Musiversal)*. Use it on screen in video, in descriptions, and in release credits.

Platform tagging

Musiversal request in their terms that you tag them on any video featuring a session from the platform. You are free to use session videos for your own content — as are they, unless you specifically rescind your consent via email.

Individual restrictions

Some musicians carry specific crediting restrictions. Several cannot be named in a released song or video title, some cannot be named at all, and at least one is credited under a pseudonym. These are individual to the musician and they are listed in the platform's terms of use.

Check the list for every musician you work with before you publish anything. The restriction usually applies to titles rather than to credits, so the standard credit format above generally remains correct, but confirm rather than assume.

What you get

Paying for the session transfers the sound recording rights to you. You can use the recording commercially without further fees, and you can sync it to picture. You own the recording.

What you do not get

No licence to advertise the platform's services with their branding, and no right to use a musician's likeness as an endorsement of your own separate products or services.

What they retain

The platform can use recordings and associated data for service improvement, including machine learning development. You can opt out of this.

SECTION 9

Tools

Charts

If you're already comfortable writing charts yourself, none of what follows applies — just write a good one and send it.

If you have some baseline chart literacy — you've used or learned to read charts before, even basically — **notation software is the best route for a simple chord chart**. MuseScore was the best one I found. It's free and simple enough to learn relatively quickly how to create a simple chord chart that served to indicate song structure and chord progressions. It's enough to get going with.

AI-generated chart images don't work yet, whatever the tool. I tested this with a vision-capable model (Gemini 3.1, around 2026) — even the simplest possible request, a basic chord-per-bar sequence, needed several rounds of correction before it looked right, and looking right to my own eye wasn't the real test. The real test was sending it to the musician, who would tell me it wasn't readable. This may improve as the tools do; at the time of writing, it didn't work reliably. Generated notation specifically — a fully transcribed part rather than a chord chart — has the same verification problem for the same reason: if you don't read fluently, you have no way to check it before the session. **If you cannot verify a chart, do not send one.** Direct by ear instead, using Section 5.

If you have zero chart literacy — you don't know what bar lines or repeats look like — two real options: Musiversal's transcription service, or messaging the musician beforehand to ask if they're willing to work the part out by ear. Many will. It costs real session time either way, diverting the session from playing into study, so weigh that against what you're actually optimising for.

The transcription service has a real logistics problem, worth knowing before you rely on it. Few transcribers are on the platform, and booking one typically means a two-week lead time. Your slot is locked to that transcriber the whole time — you can't use it for anyone else while you wait. Add a few more days after the session for the transcript itself, and you're two and a half to three weeks in before you even have it, then another week's lead time to book your first real session with a musician. That can mean three and a half weeks, close to a full month, before your first proper session happens — which, on a monthly subscription, could leave you with as few as four sessions completed in your first paid month. Know that going in.

Plain text works, within its limits. *Gmaj7(13) – C#min7 – Bsus4add6 – Em9(11), repeating.* This covered an entire violin session, because the song had one repeating progression throughout. It's best suited to a song with one consistent structure. For something more complex, plain text still works, but needs segmenting by section: the chord sequence for bars

one to thirty-two, then the change for bars thirty-three to forty-eight, then back to section A, and so on.

Reference tracks

For groove, feel or texture, a reference track beats a description. Send one or two that capture the quality you want, not necessarily with the same instrumentation. *This kind of warmth. This kind of forward motion. This kind of restraint.*

Keep the list short. Five reference tracks is no reference at all.

Isolated bounces

Underrated and almost free. If you want a player to double, answer or develop a line that already exists in the track, bounce that line on its own and send it alongside the full mix. A cello line you want a violin to play in unison is instantly clear as an isolated stem and close to impossible to describe in words.

Once, I tried to ask a musician to play a line following a particular instrument in the mix. It was easy to forget that to my ear — which had heard the song many times and was intimately familiar with it — the notes were distinguishable, but to someone hearing it for the first time, it was difficult to make out from the rest of the tracks. If you want a line specifically, bounce down the isolated audio and send it along with the full mix to refer to in the session.

This is the written-brief equivalent of singing the line, and it works for async sessions where you cannot sing anything.

File exchange

Standard practice: you upload a stem, meaning the current mix minus the part about to be recorded, along with the chart. The musician records into their own session. You receive separate audio files, plus the screen recording if you attended.

For the stem: loud enough to hear properly on headphones, not clipping. Peak around -6dB is safe. WAV, 24-bit, at your session's sample rate.

Pre-session checklist (you may not always need them all)

- ☐ Latest mix bounced as a stem
- ☐ Chord chart finalised, and verified if it is notation
- ☐ Isolated bounces prepared, if any part needs doubling or answering
- ☐ Reference tracks selected and shared
- ☐ Brief written and sent ahead, including for live sessions
- ☐ Internet connection checked
- ☐ Somewhere to write direction notes during the take

Pre-publish checklist

If your sessions become content, run this before anything goes public.

- ☐ Musician's name spelled as the platform has it
 - ☐ Credit format exactly as the terms specify
 - ☐ Individual restrictions checked for this specific musician
 - ☐ Platform tagged
 - ☐ No platform branding used without permission
 - ☐ Footage sourced only from what you are permitted to use
-

SECTION 10

What did not work

A chart that was not usable

I transcribed a part in Logic Pro's notation editor and sent it ahead. It looked competent to my eye. To the musician it was unreadable.

I pivoted. I asked them to disregard the chart and play freely over the chord progression, using the original guitar take as a reference. That produced usable material, different from what I had planned but workable.

The immediate lesson: if you do not read fluently, your transcribed chart probably is not usable. Get it transcribed properly, learn a notation tool you can actually verify, or send a chord chart and let the musician interpret.

The general one: when preparation fails inside a session, pivot to what is achievable in the time left. Do not spend twenty minutes salvaging the original plan. Cut and move.

What happened afterwards:

This was the third time of asking this musician to improvise without a good chart. They had previously recommended I engage a transcriber, but I hadn't understood that the request was more of a bar I needed to reach to qualify for further work.

Routed through the platform's transcription service, that would have roughly halved my monthly throughput. When I messaged after the session to ask whether they would be open to working parts out by ear instead, work I had watched them do quickly and well inside our own sessions, I did not get a reply.

That is their professional standard and they are entitled to it. But it crystallised something that is not about charts at all: the fix for a chart problem can be a casting decision. After that, I stopped trying to become a transcriber and started booking musicians who enjoy working the same way that I work.

When the delivery doesn't match the profile

A polished profile doesn't guarantee the delivery matches it. Your own ears on your own material are the real audition — which is exactly why Section 3 says never pre-book a run with someone you haven't heard first. When a session genuinely isn't working, raise it once, specifically, and let the musician's own material settle it — you don't need to have an argument about it. And if you're already locked into more sessions than you want with someone, you have real options: stay and keep it warm, which costs you nothing but the credit, or skip it and spend that time elsewhere, if you already know in advance it won't yield usable material. Neither costs you more than a credit.

Closing: what the research found

The question behind the project was narrow and practical. *Is a remote session platform financially maintainable and creatively useful for a beginner-to-intermediate bedroom producer on a low budget?*

Yes. On roughly \$250 a month (roughly £185 at the exchange rate when I was actually paying it) you can get a remarkable amount of real work done: string parts instead of samples, mixes rescued out of the archive, masters verified by professional ears. Four to five sessions a week for the length of the project, on a subscription I could afford.

The qualifications are the substance of this document. Cast musicians who match how you work. Vet before you commit. Do not build a workflow that depends entirely on the most in-demand players, unless you are happy to pay more and wait. Accept that some instrument families, drums in my case, may still be better served by programming and samples. Not everyone on a platform is a fit for you, and finding the collaborators who are is the work rather than an obstacle to it.

The sessions turned out to be genuinely sociable — more human contact than solo production ever gave me, and I enjoyed the rhythm of it.

If there's one thing this reinforced rather than taught me, it's this: I enjoy hearing other people's creativity — it's one of the most fun elements of making music, in any collaboration, not just remote ones. Giving up control for others to be creative has never been hard for me; it comes naturally. What changed with remote work wasn't the instinct, just the setting it turned up in again — letting a musician bring their own idea, building a comp from raw material rather than picking one perfect take. The same thing I've always valued, showing up in a new place.

Everything here is free to use, share and adapt. If something in it helped, or if something in it is wrong, I would like to know. The next version will be better for it.

David Goodenough

London, September 2026

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About this document

The Remote Direction Playbook is the third of three outputs from *The Multimedia Producer: Digital Upskilling & Remote Collaboration R&D*, a research and development project funded by Arts Council England through the National Lottery Project Grants programme, which ran from April to September 2026. The other two outputs are a series of free educational videos and a reconfigured studio facility.

The project's aim was to establish whether a self-taught producer working alone on a small budget could build a professional remote collaboration practice, and to publish what that took. All of its outputs are free at every point of access, with no paywall and no email requirement.

Sessions referenced throughout were booked through Musiversal between April and June 2026. Musicians are credited in the platform's required format. Musiversal is not a partner in or a sponsor of this project, and nothing in this document was reviewed or approved by them.

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