



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: the 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, and 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. Between April and June 2026 I ran 47 remote sessions on Musiversal, four to five a week, with fifteen different musicians and four mixing and mastering engineers. Arts Council England funded it 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 grew up in Birmingham with guitar lessons and guitar ensembles, and spent a year at Tech Music School in 2013–14 on a scholarship from *Guitar Techniques* magazine, which is where I first used Logic. Most of what I know about producing, mixing and mastering I've learned since then, largely online. I work from a home studio in London, and I received a grant to research whether remote session work is a serious option for people who work the way I do. 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 need to read music fluently, afford a day in a studio, or have directed a professional musician before. I had all of those limitations at the start of the project, and none of them stopped me having an incredible experience.

It will also be useful if you already book remote sessions and find the results inconsistent. The answer may be in here.

How to use it

Read it end to end once. It runs in the order the work happens, from preparing before you book through to what you owe the musician after the files land. After that, use it as reference. Every section opens with a short summary, so you can find your place quickly.

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If someone handed me this document at the start of the project, I would read Sections 3, 5 and 6 first.

The whole playbook on one page

- 1 **Try the platform before you pay.** Shortlist the musicians and the song before the subscription clock starts.

- 2 **Book one session with anyone new, maybe two, never three.** Every first session is an audition in both directions.

- 3 **Send a basic chord chart every time.** Most players I worked with wrote their own parts, but nearly all wanted at least the chords and bars. Ask before you book whether they need more.

- 4 **Mix the in-demand players with available ones you've vetted.** Waiting only for the busiest players quietly kills the value.

- 5 **The chart doesn't have to be perfect.** Where it falls short, sing the line, clap the beat, and react to what they just played.

- 6 **In a thirty-minute session, go for ideas, not perfection.** Bank the take and fix timing and tuning yourself afterwards.

- 7 **Leave production time between sessions.** Booking is fast; turning takes into a track is not.

- 8 **Credit properly and check the restrictions** before anything goes public.

01

Before the session

IN SHORT

- Join free, look around, and shortlist before you pay.
- Send the most finished mix you can, with the harmony written down.
- Book good slots the moment you see them, and plan your next booking before the current session ends.

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 and 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.

My mistake was what I did next: I started straight away, without a shortlist of who I wanted to book or which song I wanted to take to them. Once the clock was running I lost days to decisions I could have made for free.

So spend real time on the platform before you subscribe. Get to know the roster, decide which musicians you would book first, and know which song you would take to them. Then, the moment paid time starts, you are booking rather than 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.

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. Outside the first month you pay extra for these, but in month one they are free, and always worth taking.

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 being at peace with whatever the open approach gives you.

Send a working mix

Prepare your mix as well as you can before the session. The closer the track is to finished, the better the musician can hear where their part will sit.

Put yourself in their shoes: a track that already sounds good is more likely to prompt a better performance and a better-written part. An unfinished mix won't necessarily get a bad part, but full preparation improves your odds of getting the musician's best.

Have the harmonic structure ready

Even if you don't read music well yourself, the musician needs to know the harmony. There are three ways to give it to them, from least to most effort: chord names written in the brief, a generated chart, or a chart you make yourself in notation software. Section 9 covers all three. The short version: plain text works more often than you'd expect, AI-generated charts didn't work for me, and free notation software is worth learning.

Live or async

When you book, you choose whether you'll attend the session or send a brief and let the musician record alone. Time zones may decide this for you. Musicians live everywhere, from South Korea to Costa Rica to the US, and their morning can be your evening. A musician you particularly want may only be free in the middle of your night. Unless you're willing to stay up, you send a brief instead, and the responsibility shifts to that brief: you won't be there to redirect, so it has to set the musician up for their best take on its own.

- 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 either way.

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

Two booking realities

Slots disappear fast. Sessions with the most in-demand musicians book out quickly. If you see a slot you want, take it. I lost sessions I wanted within five minutes because I thought, "Let me just check there isn't another session I want more." By the time I got back to the page, it was gone. If the track isn't

quite finished, book anyway. The track can catch up with the booking; the booking won't wait for the track. A booked session is also a deadline, and deadlines finish tracks.

Your next slot opens the moment this one ends. Go into every session knowing who you might book next. As soon as it ends, the slot frees up. If you have a shortlist ready, you maximise your bookings over the month. If you don't, it's easy to put off searching the roster after a late session until the next morning, by which time musicians in another time zone have been booking for eight hours. You wake up and your favourite player isn't free for days, or a week.

The real constraint is the time between sessions

Booking quickly is the easy part. The hard part is the production time in between. Say you book a cello session, get the files back, and need to comp the takes and sit them in the track before you send the updated mix to the next musician. That needs real working hours in the days between sessions. Pack a month too tightly and you'll have session material piling up faster than you can use it. So get as much ready in advance as you can, and leave yourself room to produce.

Cancellations are usually infrastructure, not flakiness

Some of the roster work from regions where power cuts, internet outages and storms are ordinary. Build in 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.

02

The brief

IN SHORT

- Be specific if you know what you want. Say so if you don't.
- Fix the key, tempo and changes; leave everything else open.
- Communicate from wherever your level actually is. That's enough.

For a session you attend, the brief is optional: you'll talk through the track in the first few minutes. For a session you don't attend, the brief makes or breaks it.

Musicians on the platform work with people of every ability level, and are experienced at reading intentions from whatever you give them. Don't worry about failing to reach some level of communication you imagine you're supposed to reach. Communicate from where you are, 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, that's fine too. Let the musician lead. Often they'll come up with something you could never have imagined yourself, and you'll enjoy it more than anything you would have made alone.

Lock the parameters, lift everything else

Be clear about what is fixed and what is open. Fixed, for example: 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. Most of the musicians I worked with welcomed that freedom. Section 3 covers how to check before you book.

Let yourself be uncertain in writing

If you don't yet know what the part should be, say so. Something like this tells the musician 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.

And end warm: *"Have fun with it. Thanks in advance!"*

03

Choosing who to book

IN SHORT

- Most players wrote their own parts, but most still wanted a basic chord chart.
- Vet everyone new with a single session.
- Mix in-demand favourites with available players you've vetted.

This section is about who you book, and it is the one I would most want to read before spending any money.

Most players wrote their own parts, from a basic chart

Over the project I worked with fifteen different musicians, not counting the mixing and mastering engineers. Nearly all of them were happy to hear the track and make something up on the spot: an improvised first take, then ideas built on it as we talked. They were composers as much as players, and an open brief energised them. I suspect the platform selects for musicians who like working this way, but that is a guess.

That didn't mean they wanted nothing on paper. Most asked for a chart, even a basic one: the chords, the bar numbers, where the sections change. When I didn't have one they worked it out, but that took session time that a simple chart would have given back to playing. A basic chart goes a long way towards letting a musician do their job as well as they can. You can work without one, but I wouldn't choose to. Section 9 covers how to make one if you don't read music.

That matters if, like me, you can't write proper notation. A basic chord chart is within reach, and it was enough for nearly everyone. The rest you direct by ear, with the vocabulary you already have (Section 5).

For some, a written part is a requirement

For one musician, a proper chart was a hard requirement. They improvised happily through our first session, though they suggested I get a transcriber. By the third session they were no longer happy improvising without a proper chart. Section 10 tells the full story. I can't say whether others would have got there too: with several musicians I only did one session, and by then I'd had three with this one.

That is a legitimate way to work. In the classical world especially, creativity often goes into interpretation rather than invention: a Mozart piece has been played by thousands of people with the same notes on the page, and every performance is different in its phrasing and feeling. Some players want to give you that, and they need the part written down to do it.

So ask, in one message, before you book:

Do you prefer a chart, or are you happy to bring your own ideas?

And ask the by-ear question separately:

If I don't have a chart, are you happy to work parts out by ear from the track?

If a musician doesn't reply to either question, that's an answer too. It's a question about service fit, not character, and finding out before the session is free.

Some musicians are entirely capable of working a part out by ear and will still prefer not to, as a matter of professional standard. I watched one do it quickly and well inside a session, and later understood it wasn't part of the service they wanted to offer.

The portfolio sometimes helps. Their own compositions, arrangements and writing credits suggest someone who'll bring ideas. More often the profile doesn't say, and the only way to know is to ask, or to book one session and find out.

What charts would have cost

If you can't write charts yourself, a musician who needs a full written part means paying for a transcription first, and on Musiversal that ran on about a two-week lead time (Section 9). Needing one for every session would have taken me from fourteen to eighteen sessions a month to about eight. Because a basic chord chart was enough for nearly everyone, I never had to.

The in-demand trap

The same arithmetic applies to the roster's most in-demand players. They book out fourteen to twenty-five days ahead. Build your workflow around them exclusively and you're limited to four to eight sessions a month. Sessions run thirty minutes, so that's two to four hours of playing for a subscription of \$250, or roughly \$60 to \$125 an hour (about £45 to £95 at the rate I paid). That's getting close to what I'd expect to pay a session player directly in London, for example. It's a reasonable price, but it erases the affordability 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've vetted yourself. Waiting for a particular player is sometimes the right trade. Make it knowingly.

Vetting: book one, maybe two, never three

A profile tells you less than you'd hope. You wouldn't book three dates in a row with someone you'd never met. Book a single session with any musician you haven't worked with, and treat it as an audition running in both directions. If it's good, book more. If it isn't, 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 haven't heard on your own material. I learned this the expensive way: three sessions booked before the first had happened, the first two not landing, and the third too close to change.

Adapting the brief

IF THEY'LL WRITE THEIR OWN PART	IF THEY WANT THE PART WRITTEN OUT
Open brief, the problem stated	Specified brief, the part stated
A chord chart is enough	Notation, or close to it
Permission language does real work	Permission language is redundant
Several takes to explore	Several takes for variation

Get this right and the brief mostly writes itself.

04

By instrument and service

IN SHORT

- Strings were the clearest win over samples.
- Drums were the hardest to direct; I'd pay for an in-demand player.
- Mixing can rescue old tracks. Mastering is a finishing mechanism.

This isn't a complete guide to every instrument. It's a handful of specific things worth knowing, drawn from the sessions I ran. Where I have nothing real to say about an instrument family, I've left it out. Not every instrument was equally available while I was on the platform, which shaped where I spent my sessions and what I learned most about.

Strings

Strings were my favourite family to work with, and the string players I booked were wonderful across the board. I much prefer the nuance a real string player brings to programming MIDI strings. I love Spitfire Audio's libraries, especially the free LABS range, though Spitfire is discontinuing LABS on 31 October 2026 and moving its content to Splice.

Making programmed strings sound real rather than obviously in-the-box is a skill of its own, and one I haven't mastered yet. I've paid for some mid-tier libraries, not the premium ones that can cost hundreds or thousands of pounds each, so perhaps those close the gap on sound. But I can't imagine any library replacing the experience of working with musicians and getting back string parts that are unique and creative, parts I couldn't have imagined myself. For strings, real players win hands down for me.

One violinist told me that string players generally prefer songs in E, A, D or G, and that composers writing for strings use those keys more often than not, though not exclusively. Those keys let violinists, violists and cellists use open strings, which sound more resonant, secure and bright. Flat keys often need more complex fingering, and muting to stop neighbouring strings ringing against the harmony. Bear that in mind when choosing songs for strings, and when a player is improvising in a flat key.

Drums

The one session I ran with a highly in-demand drummer was excellent. A few sessions with more readily available drummers didn't give me material I used. Drums are the instrument I understand least, and I don't have the vocabulary drummers use to redirect a part in real time, which didn't help, though vocabulary alone wouldn't have solved everything.

I still love samples. They give you a huge number of ready-made building blocks, and I'll keep reaching for them. For me, remote sessions don't clearly beat samples for drums the way they do for strings and mastering. If I book drums again, I'll probably wait for and pay for one of the in-demand players, 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. I sent an engineer a song I'd made twelve years earlier and never finished. It came back alive in a way I'm not capable of producing myself.

That song had only four tracks, which is why one half-hour "quick mix" session covered it. A half-hour session only covers a few tracks; you can't send a whole multitrack song and expect it back in that time. A typical song needs several sessions, possibly spread over days or weeks if you want to stay with the same engineer. If you have a graveyard of simple, nearly-finished tracks, a mixing session is high value. For anything bigger, weigh that against the full-mix service, which cost extra (roughly \$200 when I checked, about the standard market 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 turns that stretch into two things I couldn't 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.

Mastering sessions were also collaborative. Engineers pushed back on choices I'd made and pointed at places to go back and improve. It was the most valuable part of the whole subscription, close to a crash course: someone listens, suggests concrete things to try (adding reverb to a snare, say) and talks through the creative decisions with you. A trained pair of ears is also an honest measure of where you are in your own mixing.

05

The live session

IN SHORT

- A basic chart helps; a bad one needn't sink the session.
- React to what they just played, in the words you already have.
- Lean towards getting out of the way.

Your voice is the chart

The most useful discovery of the whole project, and the one I'd most want a beginner to hear: **a bad chart doesn't have to mean a bad session.** A basic chord chart helps a lot, and I'd always send one. But when the chart falls short, you can still run an excellent session with a musician who'll work by ear and the willingness to direct imperfectly with the theory you actually have.

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

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'll parse a bad chart. Clap the beat as you sing, 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. And there's a hard technical limit: you can't play the track and sing along to it, because latency means your voice won't reach them in time with the audio. For async sessions, the written equivalent is an isolated bounce of the line you want doubled or answered (Section 9).

Move two: react to what they just played. Anchor your direction to their material rather than to abstract instruction. *"I liked that part. Could you do it again, but reverse the arpeggio on the last time round?"* That needs only the vocabulary you already have, tells the musician exactly what to keep, and 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 didn't exist until the cellist played the first version of them.

If you believe session musicians are only for professionals who can produce notation, I found the opposite. You'll sometimes feel the limits of your knowledge and your ability to say what you want. But the confidence to arrive with what you do know comes much sooner than you'd expect.

Running the session

- Have your chart or arrangement to hand so you can direct by bar number (*“Go back to bar thirteen, let’s try something around the G major chord”*), and keep your reference tracks bookmarked.
- During a take you’re listening and planning at once, because something early in a take might prompt your next direction. You can interrupt the moment something stands out, or let the take run. My recommendation, with a musician who’s writing their own part, is to get out of the way as much as possible. Let them roll and stay in their own creative space, and you’ll capture their real contribution. Stepping in occasionally has value too, but lean towards restraint.
- Upload the track well before the session: an hour ahead at the very least, and Musiversal recommends twenty-four hours.

Comping live takes

Treat several takes of the same part as raw material for one performance that doesn’t exist yet, rather than as 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 doesn’t need the same notes or register. It needs to sound like the same person still playing. Crossfade at the ends of phrases, between notes, never inside a sustained note.

Takes you wouldn’t keep whole can still give you a collage that feels like one performance, if you choose the best moments from each and balance the volumes carefully. The more material you capture, the more freedom you have in production to shape something from it.

06

Precision

IN SHORT

- Thirty minutes is for ideas, not perfect takes.
- Asking for a clean replay costs time and changes the mood.
- Fix timing and tuning yourself afterwards, or choose the opposite trade knowingly.

Every time I ran into tuning and timing problems in a session, I came to the same conclusion: focus the session on creative takes, and fix tuning and timing myself afterwards.

What a redo actually costs

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

When a take was improvised, "play that again" isn't a small request. The musician has to stop, listen back, work out what they actually played, relearn it by ear and reproduce it on demand. That pulls them out of a free creative mode into a mechanical, self-correcting one. It uses session time that could have produced a new idea, and it changes the quality of everything they play afterwards.

The job in the room

I see my role in a thirty-minute improvised session as protecting the container. Keep it relaxed, and keep the musician's attention on making things up rather than critiquing their own technique. Picking at intonation moves a session from imaginative to analytical, which works directly against what I'm paying for.

So the trade is explicit. I protect the session's creative breadth, and I pay for it afterwards in my own hours, with time-alignment and pitch correction.

If you'd rather have fewer, cleaner takes and less editing, that's an entirely sound decision too. It's up to you; both are valid. In a four- or six-hour day in a real studio I'd work differently myself: a creative pass first, then learn and replay the best ideas. Thirty minutes doesn't leave room for both.

Giving up control of a session is what produces parts you could not have written.

07

After the session

IN SHORT

- Don't force a take that doesn't fit.
- Extract the moment worth keeping.
- Be ready to bury your own parts to make room.

The session ends and you have audio.

Two principles for the material

When a take doesn't fit, don't force it. Beautiful playing over the wrong section is still wrong. Cutting it in because you have it doesn't 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 didn't 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'll get a set of takes you love that become the centrepiece of the track, or that fight for the same space as parts you recorded yourself and start to clutter the mix.

Then you have to decide what stays and what goes, and sometimes that means cutting or burying your own parts, parts you loved, because the mix no longer has room for them.

On "Let's Take A Trip", the piano displaced the classical guitar the whole song had been written on. That guitar part was the seed of everything, and I didn't want to lose it, so I didn't remove it. I spent a long time finding a level where it's still present, felt more than heard, no longer competing with the piano.

Burying a part counts as giving the new part room. Deleting isn't the only option. The song is the priority, not any individual part.

08

Crediting and rights

IN SHORT

- Credit format: Instrument – Name (via Musiversal).
- Check each musician's individual restrictions before publishing.
- You own the recording; you don't get to use their name as an endorsement.

This section describes Musiversal specifically, because that's the platform I used, and describes its terms as they stood while I was using it (April to June 2026). On a different platform the principles will carry and the specifics won't. Check your own terms, and check again before you publish, because terms change.

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's terms ask you to tag them on any video featuring a session from the platform. You're free to use session videos in your own content, and so are they, unless you withdraw your consent by email.

Individual restrictions

Some musicians carry specific crediting restrictions. Several can't be named in a released song or video title, some can't be named at all, and at least one is credited under a pseudonym. These are individual to each musician and 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 credits, so the standard credit format generally still stands, 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 don't get

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

What they keep

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

09

Tools

IN SHORT

- Plain chord names in the brief go a long way.
- MuseScore is free and worth a week of pain.
- If you can't check a chart, don't send one.

Charts

If you're already comfortable writing charts, skip this. Write a good one and send it.

Plain text works, within its limits. *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 read chord symbols fluently. It's free, instant, and adequate more often than you'd expect. It suits a song with one consistent structure best. For something more complex, segment it by section: the chords for bars one to thirty-two, then the change for bars thirty-three to forty-eight, then back to section A, and so on.

Notation software is the best route to a simple chord chart, if you have some basic chart literacy (you've read charts before, even a little). MuseScore was the best I found. It's free, and simple enough to learn quickly for a chord chart that shows the song's structure and progression. I learned it during the project after chart quality came up repeatedly, and it closed the problem. The learning curve is steep for a week, and then it's a tool you own.

AI-generated chart images didn't work. I tested this with a vision-capable model (Gemini 3.1, in mid-2026). Even the simplest request, a basic chord-per-bar sequence, needed several rounds of correction before it looked right, and looking right to me wasn't the real test. The real test was the musician, who told me it wasn't readable. Fully generated notation has the same problem for the same reason: if you don't read fluently, you can't check it before the session. This may improve as the tools do. For now: **if you can't verify a chart, don't send one.** Direct by ear instead (Section 5).

If you have no chart literacy at all (you don't know what bar lines or repeats look like), you have two options: ask the musician beforehand whether they'll work the part out by ear (nearly all of mine were happy to), or use Musiversal's transcription service. Know the logistics before you rely on the second. There were few transcribers, booking one meant about a two-week lead time, and

your booking slot is tied up while you wait. Add a few days for the transcription itself and a week's lead time for the real session, and you can be close to a month in before your first proper session.

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 instruments. *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's already in the track, bounce that line on its own and send it alongside the full mix. A cello line you want a violin to double is instantly clear as an isolated stem and close to impossible to describe in words.

I once asked a musician to follow a particular instrument in the mix. I'd heard the song many times, so to me that line was obvious. To someone hearing it for the first time, it was hard to pick out from everything else. If you want a specific line, send it on its own.

This is the written equivalent of singing the line, and it works for async sessions where you can't sing anything.

File exchange

Standard practice: 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 get back separate audio files, plus the screen recording if you attended.

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

Pre-session checklist

You won't always need all of these.

- ☐ Latest mix bounced as a stem
- ☐ Chord chart finalised, and checked if it's notation
- ☐ Isolated bounces prepared, if any part needs doubling or answering
- ☐ Reference tracks chosen and shared
- ☐ Brief written and sent ahead, including for live sessions
- ☐ Track uploaded at least an hour ahead (twenty-four is better)
- ☐ 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 musician
- ☐ Platform tagged
- ☐ No platform branding used without permission
- ☐ Footage limited to what you're permitted to use

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What did not work

IN SHORT

- A chart I couldn't check was unreadable. Pivot fast when prep fails.
- For one musician a proper chart was a requirement. Ask before you book.
- When a session isn't working, say so once and let the music decide.

A chart that was not usable

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

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

The immediate lesson: if you don't read fluently, a chart you write out yourself probably isn't usable. Send a chord chart instead, or learn a notation tool you can check.

The general one: when preparation fails inside a session, pivot to what you can achieve in the time left. Don't spend twenty minutes rescuing the original plan. Cut and move.

What happened afterwards. This was our third session. In the first, the musician had improvised three takes through the whole track and seemed happy to, though they'd suggested I get a transcriber. I took that as a suggestion. By the third it was clearly a condition. Afterwards I asked whether they'd keep writing their own parts by ear, something I'd watched them do quickly and well. I didn't get a reply.

That's their professional standard, and they're entitled to it. Of the fifteen musicians I worked with, they were the only one for whom a proper chart was a hard requirement; most others asked for at least a basic one. So send a basic chord chart every time, and when a musician tells you what they need, take it as a requirement rather than a suggestion.

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. When a session isn't working, raise it once, specifically, and let the musician's playing settle it. Already booked for more sessions than you want with someone? Keep them and keep it friendly, or skip them; either way it costs no more than the 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 \$250 a month (roughly £185 at the exchange rate when I was paying it) you can get a remarkable amount of real work done: string parts instead of samples, mixes rescued from the archive, masters checked 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. Vet before you commit. Send a basic chord chart, and ask before you book whether a musician needs more. Don't build a workflow that depends entirely on the most in-demand players unless you're happy to wait and pay more per hour. Some instrument families, drums in my case, may still be better served by programming and samples, though your experience may be completely different: I didn't work with every drummer on the platform, and there may well be players there who'd change my mind. Not everyone on a platform is a fit for you, and finding the collaborators who are is part of the work, not an obstacle to it.

The sessions turned out to be sociable, too: 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 love hearing other people's creativity. It's one of the most fun parts of making music, in any collaboration, not just remote ones. Giving up control so that others can be creative has never been hard for me. What changed with remote work wasn't the instinct, just the setting: letting a musician bring their own idea, and 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'd like to know. This version already corrects one thing I got wrong (see below), and the next will be better for whatever you tell me.

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 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. Prices and terms are as they stood then. 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.

What changed in version 1.1. The first edition said roughly half the musicians I worked with wanted an open brief and half wanted a chart. That overstated it. Looking back across the fifteen musicians I worked with, nearly all were happy to write their own parts. Most still asked for at least a basic chord chart, and for one, a proper written part was a requirement. Section 3 is rewritten around that, and Sections 2, 5 and 10 are adjusted to match. The rest is tightened for clarity, prices are given consistently in dollars (the platform is American) with the pound conversion at the rate I paid, and a one-page summary and section summaries have been added.

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