

"This book gives valuable knowledge on home recording for beginners or music professionals"

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Digital Engineer for Stephen Stills

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# The Complete **HOME MUSIC RECORDING** Starter Kit

Create Quality  
Home Recordings  
on a Budget!



**SONY**  
CREATIVE SOFTWARE

**que**

Buster Foyte

# The Complete Home Music Recording Starter Kit: Create Quality Home Recordings on a Budget!

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# Introduction

Want to set up a home studio so you can record fantastic-sounding music? Of course, you do! This book shows you how. No nonsense. No mind-numbingly technical concepts. No kidding.

But first let me step back a moment and paint a picture so you can determine whether you really need this book. Has this ever happened to you?

You want to record your music. You want to set up in your spare room or basement, so you start down the road to outfitting a home studio.

After a prolonged period of confusion during which you have no solid idea of where or how to start, you begin to look for answers. Every book you read, every website you visit, every salesperson you talk to barrages you with a dizzying array of options. And the price tag climbs. Specialized microphones (and several of them), equalizers, reverb units, fancy mixers, sound insulation, acoustical wall treatments...and the price tag climbs.

Then the technical jargon hits. Acoustical theories, signal-to-noise ratios, the logarithmic decibel scale—all of it leaves you confused and uncertain, and still the price tag climbs.

Soon the apparent complexity of what you need to learn overwhelms you, and the cost of what you're told you need to buy leaves the upper limit of your budget looking like a tiny dot in your rearview mirror. So you put your dreams on hold yet again. If you're lucky, you haven't spent much already. But probably you have. So you have a little more gear (though still not enough) and a lot less money. What you definitely do not have is a home studio capable of doing high-quality work. "Someday," you say, "someday..."

## The Accessibility of Modern Recording Methods

If that story sounds sadly familiar, you've grabbed the right book! I've been there. In fact, I struggled in that frustrating cycle for years, scratching out substandard quality recordings as best I could with the gear I could beg, borrow, or (oh so rarely) buy. Don't get me wrong; I enjoyed every minute of every recording I've made over the years. But it sure would have been nice to end up with something of high enough quality that I would have felt good about releasing it. But I could never get there with the gear I had.

Well, I'm here to tell you, friend, that all this has changed in just the past few years. "Someday" has finally arrived! Suddenly, after being locked away from us mere mortals, the ability to make great-sounding home recordings without going broke—and going to college to study audio engineering—has become not only possible, but also affordable. Computers, software, and other fantastic technological advances have liberated all of us! Pretty dramatic, isn't it? Yes, as a matter of fact, it is!

Recording technique has come a long way since Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville beat the commonly credited Edison by almost 20 years to the world's very first sound recording with his phonautogram in 1860.

### EDISON REMAINS UNDIMINISHED!

Even though most people believe that Thomas Edison invented audio recording, it was actually Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, a French inventor/dabbler, who created the first audio recording device and the first audio recording itself. He called the machine the *phonautogram*. But if Edison happens to be your hero, don't worry! Turns out he was still a pretty smart guy.

As a twist to the bizarre story of the phonautogram, apparently Scott de Martinville, though having devised a way to record the sound onto paper as sound wave diagrams, had for some odd reason envisioned us *reading* recorded sound, not hearing it, and thus had developed no way to play it back audibly. Go figure.

Edison's recording of *Mary Had a Little Lamb* then remains by common consensus the first ever to be *heard* after it was recorded. Scott de Martinville's recording was not heard until earlier this year (2008!) when scientists devised a way to optically read the squiggles his device made and turn them into sound. The recording turned out to be of the French folk song *Au Clair de la Lune* and the audio quality was—well, let's just say you'll do far, far better with the techniques you learn in this book! But still, it was a lot easier to identify the song once we could *hear* the recording than it was when we could only *look* at it. On that score, Scott de Martinville got it wrong; Edison got it right.

We now find ourselves well into the digital age, and still it's surprising how few people have awakened to the new age of recording technology. It still isn't free to set up a home studio, but it's never been more affordable than right now. You're going to have to spend some money, but if you follow my advice, you'll be amazed at just how little we're talking about (compared to traditional recording methods) and equally amazed at the fantastic results you'll get from the gear you buy.

So prepare to be amazed, because I'm going to show you exactly how to do it. You'll be recording your music in no time.

## Ten Assumptions

Throughout this book, I'm going to proceed under a certain set of assumptions. If even just a couple of these assumptions turn out to be true of you and your situation, you'll get something valuable out of this book. If you can live with most or all 10 of these assumptions, the potential exists for your recording output to explode!

As I discuss various topics throughout this book, I'll remind you of these assumptions so you have a complete understanding of why I make the recommendations that I do.

Here then I present my 10 assumptions:

1. You have a strong desire to record great-sounding music, mostly on your own, in a home studio.
2. You are not able (or willing) to set up a pro-level home studio environment. By this, I mean that it isn't practical for you to undertake a complete renovation of your basement to turn it into a state-of-the-art studio.
3. You can afford to—and are willing to—spend a reasonable amount of money on setting up your studio, but you need to make the most out of every dollar, euro, peso, or whatever it is that you spend. In other words, as we say in the United States, "You need to get the most bang for your buck."
4. You are not free to make unlimited amounts of noise during the recording process. For instance, you have roommates, parents, kids, neighbors, or others who might be less than appreciative if your power chords keep them awake at 1:23 a.m. or interrupt their viewing of *American Idol*.
5. You want the most control possible over the recording, editing, and mixing process, and you want as much flexibility as you can possibly get in how you create your projects. And, importantly, you are not afraid—or are at least willing to overcome your fear—of computers.
6. You're willing to be flexible and open minded and can set aside any purist attitudes toward gear in the interest of accomplishing great recordings in the less-than-great recording environment I mentioned in assumption 4.
7. You're willing to concede that sometimes, in the interest of getting something done given the realities of your home-studio setup and budget, it's okay to settle for techniques that the "pros" or purists might dismiss as not up to their standards. In other words, it's not the technique that obsesses you; it's the quality of the *results*.
8. You're not interested in sorting through the details of a bunch of different techniques that you might never use to find the one that might work for you. Rather, you want a clear, concise, proven path to getting your music recorded with very high quality.
9. You want to skip nonessential technical details and jargon in the interest of getting results quickly. You can—and should—learn all you can about recording technology, but I refuse to let your lack of expertise in technical areas stop you from recording music right now!
10. You're willing to record with mostly electric or electronic instruments whenever that's practical. You'll need to use a microphone for some things, but any time you can avoid a live mic, you avoid lots and lots of headaches!

## Quick Guide to *The Complete Home Music Recording Starter Kit*

Throughout this book, I'll tell you exactly what you need to know to set up your home recording system. The techniques I talk about are not just theoretical; these techniques are the same proven, practical techniques that I've used to record my own musical projects. If you're interested in hearing the kind of results I get from the techniques I discuss in this book, check out my music at [www.busterfayte.com](http://www.busterfayte.com). (As long as you're there, take a minute to sign onto my mailing list so I can keep you up to date with what I'm doing!)

Don't get hung up on whether or not you like my music or my singing or guitar playing. Instead, focus on the production and recording quality. Does it exhibit a level of production quality that would make a positive impression on your fans and industry contacts? Is the quality high enough to make you feel good about charging your fans \$10 to buy a CD? Would you buy the music of your favorite artist if it exhibited this same recording quality? Although I know my own results will improve with every project, I'm proud to say that I think my recordings pass these tests—and my fans obviously agree! That's what we're after, and that's what this book teaches.

### What We'll Discuss

The first step in the process involves basic organizational decisions and whether to go analog or digital. You've heard the arguments; here we'll discuss the realities and the logical, cut-and-dry, never-look-back, no-second-thoughts choice. The decision is really simple, and I'll show you why.

Next, we'll talk about your recording space. Remember, I'm assuming you don't have the producer's dream studio in your basement, so you have limitations. We'll talk about how you're going to not only live with, but actually thrive despite those limitations. We'll also discuss the computer gear you need and how to set all of it up.

After that, we'll lay down some guide tracks to get us started and then spend several chapters talking about the realities of recording different instruments.

We'll end with discussions of mixing, mastering, and delivery. After that, you're on your way to quality recording projects in your own studio.

## Special Elements

Throughout this book, I'll sprinkle in four special elements: Notes, Tips, Cautions, and sidebars. Also, I'll end each chapter with a section called "Studio Log." The Studio Log summarizes the chapter and gives you the main points in easily reviewable form. Here's what each of these elements looks like:

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### NOTE

I'll use a Note when I want to give you some small piece of interesting information that doesn't really fit into the flow of the current text. It might be a resource you could look into for further understanding, a place where you can go to see or hear an example of what I'm discussing, or some other helpful tidbit.

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### TIP

I'll use Tips when I think I know of a way to make a task a bit easier or a way to give you better results. For instance, if I'm discussing recording a guitar, I might use a tip to remind you to make sure you're in tune.

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### CAUTION

I'll use Cautions when something I'm telling you to do has a potential danger toward your project, your gear, or you. For instance, if I'm telling you to play your recording back while wearing headphones, I might use a Caution to remind you to turn the volume down first so you avoid damaging your hearing.

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### SIDEBAR

I'll use sidebars when I have an interesting or amusing story to tell that's related to the topic I'm discussing, but not necessarily critical to the discussion. Sidebars provide a little bit of fun and color commentary. They're a lot like Notes, only longer.

You saw a sidebar earlier when I told the story of the first recording machine.

## Studio Log

I'll end each chapter with a "Studio Log" section. Here I'll provide a short recap of what the chapter covered, just as you might enter a summary of what happened during a recording session into your studio log book. The Studio Log brings out the main points one more time to reinforce what you have learned in that chapter. If you want a quick summary of the entire book, you could cheat and read all the Studio Logs first.

Now that you know what this book's all about, let's get started with the details and the fun.