

# The Basics of Promoting Recordings to Folk Radio

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including whether you should use a promoter

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Nobody knows the trouble I've seen as a folk DJ for more than fifteen years, although a list appears on the penultimate page. Long before I became a radio promoter, I thought I saw every kind of mistake people make in servicing radio. As a promoter, I invented some new ones but also gained many insights into what even the most gifted artists, record companies, engineers, and producers often don't know about promoting to folk radio. Gaffes come not just from self-promoted projects; even labels and promoters not used to working the folk charts often don't get it right. Folk radio forms its own specialty (see the section on picking the right format below) with its own mores which few other than folk radio promoters and folk DJs understand.

With this edition, I continue to refine my attempt to distill what I have learned both sending and receiving CDs and files over my more than 40 years in this business. This guide explains solid practices to avoid shooting yourself in the foot or wasting time and money. I base my suggestions and my radio promotion practice on the simple philosophy of treating DJs exactly the way I like best as a DJ. I intend this document to be a guide for those trying to decide whether to promote themselves, a how-to for those promoting their recordings, and an aid to understanding the process for those using a promoter so as to take greatest advantage of the investment.

A **glossary** appears near the end of this hardly hefty, but growing, tome. It contains not just definitions for radio and promotion terms but a good deal of information not appearing otherwise. If I use a term you don't know, check it in the glossary. Before the glossary I include these **appendices**: 1) digital delivery setup, 2) about videos, and 3) a timeline example.

## Choosing the right radio format and a word about charts

The artist needs carefully to consider where best to invest their promotional money. Spreading resources too thin can only produce middling results at best.

Those with adequate resources, such as the Jackson Browne and Janis Ian projects I have worked, invest in a separate promoter for each format in which they want to chart. Without those resources, one has to choose the best. Consider the tribe or community in which you work. Compare charts to see how competitive you feel with the names you see. For folk radio, it is essential to think of it as broadcast service for our community more than as merely a radio format. We are friends playing music made by our friends.

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**"You only know you have a hit record when you see it on the charts"**  
- Paul Craft to me, 1988

Definition of genre has become increasing sociological rather than musicological, further complicating matters. Bluegrass, for example, has become increasingly music that bluegrass fans like rather than fitting a hard definition based in instruments, vocal arrangements, or lyrics. Concomitantly, the tribe or tribes with which an artist is identified establish the format as much or more than the music. That said, folk radio stands as the most open and diverse format with the shortest path to broadcast.

The differences in how promotion to each format works force the most effective promoters to specialize in just one or sometimes two closely allied like folk and bluegrass. Commercial formats like Americana and AAA operate in entirely different ways than folk, bluegrass, or blues. More significantly, those three are not just radio formats, but genre of music, about which whole ecosystems and communities with venues, clubs, events, print media, and shared values. Radio serves and lives among those tribes. AAA (Adult Album Alternative), Americana, and Non-Comm (in some ways AAA on college and community stations) are simply radio formats.

**Charts** define format, so promoters work specific charts. Here we'll be talking about the Folk Alliance International (FAI, and formerly called FolkDJ) and the NACC Folk Charts, the two I work, along with a secondary focus on *Bluegrass Unlimited* and *Bluegrass Today*. Promoters sometimes bleed over into other formats, but rarely match the results achieved with their focus charts. Sheer volume makes it difficult to maintain enough relationships with programmers and different ways of promotion to work multiple formats effectively. Specialization is a hallmark of all top promoters among the various roots music radio formats.

“Formats are not the same as genres, which are categories of music. Formats are the way those categories are arranged. Some stations run multiple genres, but most have a signature tone and style selected to appeal to particular demographics and niches.” - *LiveAbout.Com*

Richard Gillman of KBCS began what is now the **FAI Chart** as the FolkDJ Chart, compiling data from the playlists posted on the FolkDJ listserv (more on that later). Kari Estrin kept the chart going after Gillman and upgraded its systems and accuracy until FAI took over in 2019. The FAI Chart appears once per month, often the second Wednesday, and is usually online several hours before the official announcement. FAI consists of three charts—Album, Song, and Artist (the most plays reported of all releases). The FAI Charts compile all plays reported in a correct format during the month regardless of whether the releases are current. Reporters report all the songs they played. The FAI Folk Chart is not weighted, meaning that each play counts the same whether the station is 100 watts or 100,000 or online only.

NACC stands for National Association of College and Community Radio. The **NACC Folk Chart** is one of several format charts in addition to its Top 200. In any one week at most a third of the 170 NACC Folk reporters submit to chart appearing Tuesday night. Reporters use an online form in which they rank in order their top ten releases and another for their up to top ten new adds for the past week. Singles, albums, and EP's are mixed together on one chart. Only recordings released in the past 12 months are charted. While the adds chart is not weighed, the main NACC Folk Chart is. Weighted charts grant greater impact to the outlets with the greatest reach - satellite and syndicated programming and the least to low power and Internet stations. The NACC charts are weighted on five tiers from 1 for low power (LP) and internet only radio up to 5 for such as Bob McWilliams on Kansas Public Radio or Mary Sue Twohy on SiriusXM. Both folk charts offer transparency—every submission can be seen—unmatched in the other charts. Both major bluegrass charts are quite opaque in contrast.

Numerous other charts of different kinds and value exist: AirPlay Direct (APD) DJ downloads; Music Meeting Directory, measuring initial streaming and download interest by NACC reporters, and various related airplay charts: EarShot! (Canada), Roots Music Report, and Americana Music Association.

The specialization reflects the essential role of college and community radio in playing the music iHeart, NPR, and Clear Channel stations don't. With so many genre deserving space on the broadcast spectrum, roots radio runs on specialty shows and stations dedicated to one or two genre. Thus we have formats and charts for bluegrass, folk, Americana, blues, AAA, Non-Comm, and world.

Old-time direct to DJ promotion still exists in folk, bluegrass, Celtic, and blues more than working with music directors or music committees curating whole station playlists at AAA, Americana, and NonComm stations. DJs make most of the programming choices as if AOR inventor Lee Abrams were never born. It is heavily personal relationship driven work where lots of folks still expect CDs and direct email.

AAA, Americana, and Non-Comm all play by commercial radio rules. This is Mars compared to folk's

Venus. In these three the relationships are with music directors vetting what can be added to the station playlist from which hosts select songs. Songs move week by week from In Review to Under Consideration to Added to the Playlist, Specialty Show Play, or just Available in Library. The digital music arrives via playMPE which costs \$600 to send the same song twice. Getting airplay in Americana almost assuredly requires using a competent, well-known promoter who works those charts.

The world of folk radio is far larger than represented on the FAI Folk Chart and NACC Folk Chart. 150 reporters are registered to FAI and 170 to NACC. I am one of ten DJs that report to both charts, so that leaves 310 unduplicated reporters to the two major charts. Unfortunately, far less than half the registered reporters report in any single period. On top of that, my database contains 1150 folk hosts, stations, and syndicated shows (“strips” in jargon), so much, if not most, folk and roots radio play goes unreported.

## What is a folk radio promoter

Radio promoters provide recorded music and information to radio programmers, both individual hosts and station music directors. We evaluate the potential of music to get played on folk radio and make decisions on what we promote based on that. This means that we have a gatekeeper or, perhaps more accurately, imprimatur role much like agents, labels, or managers. What we do, in a nut shell, is select good recordings and get that music to the DJs likely to play it. All we can promise is to get a recording a fair shot at airplay. Ultimately, people play the songs that best fit their tastes and the show’s format.

Skills include maintaining relationships and regular communication with hundreds of hosts; keeping data about radio stations as up to date as possible; making music available to radio by streaming and download; checking lyrics for words that need to be flagged; preparing assets; selecting to whom to send CDs; and tracking airplay and thanking hosts. Radio promoters usually have resources, volume discounts on download, streaming, and chart services, printing, and postage, and relationships with programmers beyond those of an individual artist. Most of all, promoting folk recordings is what we do week after week with the systems and infrastructure to do just that. Programmers expect to hear from us and know why we are reaching out.

Folk radio promotion is a specialty to which only a few professionals are devoted full-time. Unlike more commercial formats, folk radio promotion is one on one, retail, not wholesale work. We work with hundreds of individual hosts who mostly act as their own music directors. Since it is based on dozens of individual relationships, effective folk radio promotion takes a lot of time, especially in tracking airplay and thanking those who play the music. As you’ll read, no single bullet theory works — delivery to folk radio requires multiple channels. Doing folk radio promotion well requires being focused on promoting music to folk radio, not other formats or doing publicity work to print and web outlets. I’ll explain my process shortly.

**Radio promoters and publicists are two very different, albeit related, professions** involving entirely different skills sets and relationships, too many for one person. Radio and press, mostly online anymore, are as different as bluegrass and old-time—related but hardly the same. One can be mediocre at both radio and publicity with results to match or excellent at one. Going with the same person for both press and radio hardly

## FAI FOLK CHART FOR AUGUST 2021

Compiled from FOLKDJ-L playlists  
Based on 14725 plays from 492 playlists from 123 Folk DJs

### FAI FOLK CHART TOP ALBUMS OF THE MONTH

Rank	Album	Artist	Plays
1	Downhill From Everywhere	Jackson Browne	109
2	A Better Day A-Coming	Robin and Linda Williams	98
3	Song to a Refugee	Diana Jones	92
4	Sober Again	Jackson Grimm	84
5	Come Around	Rob Lutes	80
6	Other Voices, Other Rooms	Nanci Griffith	77
7	Why Wait!	Kate Taylor	75
8	The Canvas Before Us	Joy Zimmerman	62
9	Cold Rain and Snow	Jared Rabin	57
10	Borrowed Time	Joe Troop	54
10	Until Now	Carrie Newcomer	54
12	Sun and Moon	Trevor Tchir	52
12	Watchhouse	Watchhouse	51

Genre Charts - Top Adds - Station Contacts - Going for Adds - My Account - Logout

### Top 30 Folk Charts WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 3

Download Individual Charts  
Download Top 30 (XML) Download Top 30 (CSV)

TW	LW	Artist	Recording	Label
1	1	RAYE ZARAGOZA	Women In Color	Self-Released
2	2	MOLLY TUTTLE	...But I'd Rather Be With You	Compass
3	5	KURT VILE	Speed, Sound, Lonely KV [EP]	Matador/Beggars
4	3	KATHLEEN EDWARDS	Total Freedom	Dualtone/eOne
5	23	STURGILL SIMPSON	Cuttin' Grass Vol. 1	High Top Mountain
6	11	RESISTANCE REVIVAL CHORUS	This Joy	Righteous Babe
7	7	AVETT BROTHERS, THE	The Third Gleam	Loma Vista
8	6	WAR AND TREATY, THE	Hearts Town	Rounder
9	16	LEYLA MCCALLA	Vari-Colored Songs: A Tribute To Langston Hughes	Smithsonian Folkways
10	14	DIRK POWELL	When I Wait For You	Compass
11	10	DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS	The New OK	ATO
12	N/A	MIPSO	Mipso	Rounder/Concord
13	9	CHRIS SMITHER	More From The Levee	Signature Sounds

produces the best results. Pennywise; pound foolish.

Publicists are more expensive than radio promoters, since it is harder to get significant print or web exposure than on the radio, especially at the higher levels. A DJ can play 15 songs in an hour; a newspaper at most one music article a day. Unless contracted otherwise, we also aren't your Spotify playlist promoter (a separate profession), social media agency, recording label, retail salesperson, videographer, manager, or booking agent. These are all roles for others.

**The artist releasing her own material is a record label and an executive producer.** Without a label or manager, the artist is responsible for hiring and coordinating the project team, making sure, for example, the timelines are coordinated, the assets and digital files properly prepared with metadata encoded, and information circulated. If you aren't on a label, then you are a label and have every right to name it.

## Self-promotion compared to using a radio promoter

People can scrape together a passable folk radio, especially the Folk Alliance International (FAI) chart reporters, list using publicly available information, including the FAI reporters and, if you are a paid promotional subscriber, those for NACC. If you have been in the business awhile and attend FAI conferences and regionals, you have met a good deal of programmers already and assiduously collected their contact info. Nor are the mechanics difficult. I explain them in this booklet.

Yet radio promoters have many advantages over DIY, the same as with any specialized professional compared to part-time or amateur. For radio promoters this is our day job, a serious profession. Most of us work six or seven days a week immersed in folk radio. We spread the costs of services we use for hosting downloads, tracking info, and streaming across multiple releases during a year and pass those savings on to our clients.

## Before You Begin to Promote

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| • Create a timeline for promotion to radio and press and the commercial release                   | * | download and streaming. At a minimum you need a streaming service, such as Soundcloud, and an effective download platform plus Airplay Direct. |
| • Develop a budget for all aspects of the project   | * | CD graphics as image files and liner notes, booklet, and other assets as PDFs  |
| • Crowdfund or otherwise raise the needed money   | * | Lyrics as a PDF or Word docx   |
| • Collect what you will need for promotion  | * | Text and layout for one-sheet and track sheet or card.   |
| * WAVs and MP3-320s of the final masters encoded with metadata, including ISRC, and available for | * | Postal mailing list and email list   |
|   | * | Mailing supplies   |

We can provide access to services that ship your CDs including postal rates less than you can get; sometimes for printing too. We have churned out one sheets and track sheets or cards for years. We are used to doing this work and use our proven processes to do it.

Infrastructure along with contact info for and long lasting relationships with dozens of DJs and programming outlets form the largest advantage radio promoters enjoy. We know whether they prefer downloads or CDs, interviews or not, how much communication they like to receive, and the history of their spins. DJs expect to hear from us, and we may send several dozen albums and singles a year. I do at least one a week save for the end of the year. Thus our snail and email lists are constantly being updated.

Independent radio promoters, therefore, have the very best proprietary lists of program hosts (I've maintained mine since August 1984), snail mail and email, often in formats that allow querying across variables. We have proprietary databases of plays that allow for targeting hosts based on their playing history. Most of the time we do a better job than in house label promoters to such a degree that an artist on a label sometimes hires one of us with her own money to do folk or bluegrass radio.

We are gatekeepers in the post recording industry era. Once upon a time, recording labels did the vetting, often marking the first hurdle that once cleared led to agents, managers, and gigs. The democratization of the recording process, the diminution of the role of mid-sized indy labels that once dominated folk, and collapse of retail sales has produced a wild, wild world where anyone can release music. That a promoter believes in your release (our choices do reflect on us and our ability to keep a gate) and that you are willing to invest in it convey a positive message. Otherwise, potential agents and presenters are looking at social, email, and web activity numbers and how many shows the artist plays each year.

If anything, digital only releases increase the need for a professional who has the vast email contacts with the infrastructure and practice of delivering music to radio. Folk radio promoters are trusted sources for new music, not strangers. **A non-album digital single by an artist with limited name recognition is the most difficult item to promote to radio** since 40% either won't play singles or won't play digital files. The digital space is not an equitable playing field; name recognition is even more important than physical.

## Reasons to self-promote

**You have the time, money, knowledge, and willingness** to get it done. This is the best, albeit, most challenging reason. Kristin Grainger & True North ran a very successful album campaign in 2021, but they earned every spin with tons of hard work and then even more work as I could tell from the DJ end. You plan a **limited campaign** to a targeted group from as small as just DJs you know or no larger than the 150 FAI Folk Chart reporting registrants. You have **high name recognition** among folk programmers *and* access to recent email and snail mail lists. You have a **truly up to date postal mail and email lists** that are comprehensive for your target audience

**Save money.** This is the most common and worst reason. Successfully promoting your own record is a lot of work. Much more for you than I due to the reasons already noted. If you have a day job or a busy performance calendar, you should seriously consider whether you have the time and capacity to become a record promoter. Or, sadly, if you don't succeed in hiring a radio promoter, reconsidering whether to release the recording becomes advisable. Just because art is good doesn't mean it has an audience.

## Before going alone consider adjustments and hybrid approaches with pro assistance

Some radio promoters (or mailing services) may be willing to work with you to provide some professional help while working within a limited budget. You can explore options. Big drivers are the cost of mailing CDs in postage and work time and the time involved in tracking airplay and thanking DJs.

**Adjustments to full promotion** that reduce the fees and total costs are:

- Mailing fewer CDs
- Doing the one sheet printing and CD mailing yourself, but you still have to pay for postage and printing.
- Shortening the period for the which the promoters is engaged.

**Alternatives to full promotion:**

- Hiring a professional promoter or mailer to do the printing and mailing only using their proprietary mailing list.
- Engaging a professional to make a custom CD mailing list, then handling the promotion yourself.
- A digital only album promotion with CDs available on request which will reduce results
- Consulting with a professional to get started on the right foot.

## Selecting a Radio Promoter

Should you decide to use a folk radio promoter and wisely avoid the we-can-do-it-all-sorta-OK folks, you face a rather small group of us who make promoting to folk radio their primary means of making a living. That makes it rather simple to reach out to one or more of us. Should the promoter to be interested enough to speak with you, be prepared. Consider these factors and have your answers ready:

- Your goals for the release
- Your budget for radio promotion
- Whether you are have CDs designed
- Whether you will be doing an advance single
- Whether you will make a video to be pitched
- When—in the best case several months in the future—you plan to release the music.
- How much involvement you will have.

**You can't control whether programmers like what you do, but can assure that you service them well. Think process rather than outcomes.** DJs like to be industry insiders, not fans, getting news and the best music first, getting special access, receiving interviews and liners. DJs are the people who were sharing new music as soon as they got their first turntable. They want to expose people to the new sounds they like best. Promoters cut through the clutter by delivering that consistently and the way programmers need it.

# Some key concepts in getting your music to radio

## What you need to know whether working with a promoter or on your own.

In any aspect of human activity, **you can only control the process, not the results.** Radio promoters each have proven processes that have worked for them many times. We can assure that a recording gets listens from many programmers, that it gets the chance, but airplay comes down to personal taste and their formats. Lots of good recordings effectively promoted don't climb far up the charts. Any promoter can provide examples of projects we really liked that didn't catch fire.

No amount of promotion can "fix" a weak recording or even a poor CD design or package. DJs receive far more material than we can hear, much less play on air. No need exists to play a song they don't like. A strong recording is the first and most important step and far and away the most important role for the artists.

However early that you think you should start promotion with or without a professional, you'll do better starting earlier. If you do it yourself, start even earlier. The very best practice is either develop your plan or to contract with a promoter before you even start recording and certainly no later than the rough mixes. When involved, radio promoters provide essential input into album cover design, when to release, how many units, which songs to release as singles, and other matters.

## Timelines organize promotions

A timeline is the most basic tool for organizing and tracking the progress of your promotion, helping the artist coordinate the release. **The ability of a release to obtain strong airplay is largely determined before release. Preparation makes a difference.** Nothing defeats your purpose worse than starting too late in the radio promotion process (it is even worse for publicity to reviewers and feature writers with long lead times). Use the handy rule of thumb: If you have the rough mixes, you have waited as long as is reasonable. If you want to do promo right, the artists needs to let the promoter have time review the CD covers and packaging and have the manufactured CDs in hand at least six weeks before release. Otherwise, if you are almost ready for the CDs to be manufactured, you have waited far too long and will have to either hustle or delay. If you start when you have the songs written and arranged, you are on top of things and are preparing for success.

Even compressing the timeline and moving at the fastest speed, promotional work would start worst case no later six weeks before the radio add date, e.g. when you want DJs to start playing the song. If you plan to use a promoter, you ought to engage them worst case no less than twenty weeks before. I can sometimes work in an established client with a few as six weeks notice, sometimes not, but generally I am scheduling promotions six to eight months in advance.

Neither an artist nor a radio promoter should ever presume to know better what a programmer should play than the DJ herself.

*An example of a good timeline appears as Appendix 3.*

## Get More Plays by Making Things Easy for Programmers

Reality check: *artists need airplay more than DJ's need more music to play.* That means radio programmers' needs come first. On top of voluminous download links, hosts receive a steady stream of CDs. Counting digital, some weeks I have received more than 700 songs as a DJ with a one hour, once a week show!

Most folk and roots hosts are volunteers trying to find time to screen music and put a show together. This is why track sheets or cards or essential. Whoever makes it easiest for a host to program their recording, especially if the artist isn't a big name, the more likely they will give it a chance. Removing barriers seems obvious, but even the best labels fumble some of these mostly common sense matters when promoting to folk.

CDs with designs optimized for DJs are more likely to be heard. Art, timing, medium, packaging - every detail in the process either enhances or detracts from a project's airplay and effects your hard costs of promotion. A poor design implies sloppiness or corner cutting in other areas. A 4-panel wallet with 1/8 inch spine with no shrink wrap mails at half the cost and has a better chance than a shrink wrapped jewel case.

Lots of those submissions are a waste of money because they don't fit the show. That factor is another thing radio promoters track across multiple projects and years. Of the albums I receive as a DJ, only 25% clearly have at least one song for my show; 50% clearly don't fit just on content such as a love song for my political song show (sent to a list without thought or knowledge); and 25% are maybes usually due to lack of lyrics or

track descriptions. That means I have to take extra time to screen them, which usually means they never get played. Think before you send about the person on the receiving end.

*Get your music to the DJs in multiple ways. One post to folkDJ post won't get it done.*

- Send CDs to those who prefer them and digital downloads to those happy to use them, obviously. This, of course, requires that knowledge. Although this is changing rapidly due to COVID, no more than 60% of DJs are truly download friendly.
  - Direct email to hosts, which is another place where professional promoters have a big logistical and data advantage, is essential. Nothing produces greater results. Social media doesn't replace direct email. Send the message at least seven times through multiple media to each host.
  - Airplay Direct (APD) has some issues such as no WAVs or one sheet downloads and lots of non-reporter, Internet only, and non-North American DJ downloaders, but it is where many DJs discover new music. Some who have other digital options prefer using APD. Use its DPK feature for an additional direct email push to all the DJs on your list. Use it twice for each recording two or three weeks apart. This is a paid service that costs \$50 per year for an individual artist contracting directly with APD. Promoters often pay for a label account for their clients and spread the costs over several dozen releases. Use artist name—title format. Enter contact info so DJs can reach you. Be sure to enter your ISRC's!
  - Subscribe to the FOLKDJ listserve (folkradio.org), post your notice and links (not "write me for a link") there, and build your DIY mailing list for snail and email there. Posts that give no way to obtain the music for download—and these are very common—are annoying at best. Give the DJs the links. Don't make them write for it. Respect the time of volunteers.
  - Post on the FolkDJ Facebook group and your own socials without download links in those public spaces.
  - Having a private, advance DJ streaming is important. Streams can be kept private for just the media and offered to them in advance of the downloads and promo CDs to whet interest.
  - The NACC charts, for subscribers paying \$600 per annum with the FAI discount, offers handy tools: NACC's own Going For Adds (GFA) listing for each Tuesday and, even more important, the *Music Meeting Directory* service provides download links for what promoters submitted for that Tuesday and sends out weekly charts of responses thereto.
  - And, of course, mailing CDs. The costliest but still most effective means even though it seems like radio is the only reason to make them anymore. In 2020, John McCutcheon with Kari Estrin promoting achieved **the first, and still only, digital-only album to reach #1** on the FAI Folk Chart. No one has come close since. Maximum folk radio airplay still demands physical.
- ◇ Expensive - on top of the cost of CDs, at even the lowest color printing and postage rates you are looking at total investment \$2.50 to \$5 for each unit you send to media within the USA. \$10 and up elsewhere. Radio promoters or their associates often have access to discounted mailing rates and sometimes even understand the postal system better than the post office counter person. A wallet style, single CD in a soft pack can mail 1st class at \$1.87. Less flexible or larger requires Media Mail for \$4.13, more than double. Some promoters in bluegrass make a CD sleeve into the 1-sheet and mail in cardboard for 99 cents. This has numerous downsides, real and symbolic.
- ◇ Lists of radio require constant updates from multiple sources. Radio promoters do this for a living. Most lists one can buy are woefully out of date; you can't buy a list worth using. Thanks to such, I still get CDs addressed to me as Music Director at a station in another state where I was just a DJ 13 years ago. Only professional promoters and some labels have current lists with even the most up to date being out of date.. You can build your own list of radio programmers from posts on FolkDJ, Googling, downloads from APD, lists of chart reporters, but that is a lot of work.

Full albums on compact disc remain essential for strong folk radio airplay. 40% of DJs only use those. Folk radio might be the last hold out for CDs.

### For CDs:

- Make the package easy to open. Many folk DJs are older than 60. Professional mailers may waste a lot of

## About clean language

Provide warnings and, when possible, radio edits for any track that a reasonable person could consider not appropriate for airplay. "The 7 words you can't say" was a comedy routine by George Carlin, not FCC regulations which are much fuzzier, based on context and community. For example, "He was pissed off," is legal since it doesn't directly refer to the bodily function. Nonetheless, many DJs would be uncomfortable playing it and pissed off at you for not warning them. If no issues, state prominently "All tracks have clean language."

Different classes of offensive material exist. It doesn't have to be "bad" words either. Graphically describing something patently offensive using "nice" words is not acceptable either.

Three legal classes:

1) obscene material: not protected by first amendment, appealing to the prurient interest, lacking redeeming value, and describing sexual content in a patently offensive way. Obscene material is forbidden at all times.

2) profane material: "so grossly offensive to members of the public who actually hear it as to amount to a nuisance."

3) indecent material: "language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities."

Indecent and profane material may not be played between 6 am and 10 pm

The fourth category is informal: words like "crap" that FCC clears but DJ may be uncomfortable playing on the radio. DJs should be warned about these too. **Safe is best.**

plastic and paper, but they use at least half the packaging tape that civilians do. Avoid the sort of non-paper mailer depicted to the right. They are wicked hard to open.

- If you use a wallet with spine no more than 1/8 inch you can mail one CD in a regular kraft envelope like this on the left.

- Don't have shrink wrap put on the DJ copies of CDs unless you are inexplicably using atavistic jewel cases. Shrink wrap is just an obstacle for the host to get to your music.
- **No jewel cases!** Repeat. No jewel cases. Too bulky adding at least \$1.70 to each one you mail. Too easy to break. Take up too much storage space. No good can be said about jewel cases by a reasonable person.

- The CD packaging itself needs to be not just DJ-friendly but optimized for DJ use. DJs are the primary audience for CDs these day. Plan accordingly. Easy to read, song durations, simple to take CD in and out.

- **Always have a spine with the name of the artist and release.** Remember, DJs may be looking for your CD among thousands. Look at the adjacent photo of what a DJ faces often under severe time pressure. Track listing on the CD and one-sheet must include ordinal number of track, name of track, and duration. DJs need that.

Imagine someone needing a 3:25 long song in 60 seconds from a CD wall like the one to the right.

- CDs must be easy to shelf efficiently. Unusual packages may gain initial attention, but then get lost. I didn't play a Windborne release I

*A schematic for a 4-panel wallet with spine, my recommendation, appears on the next page.*

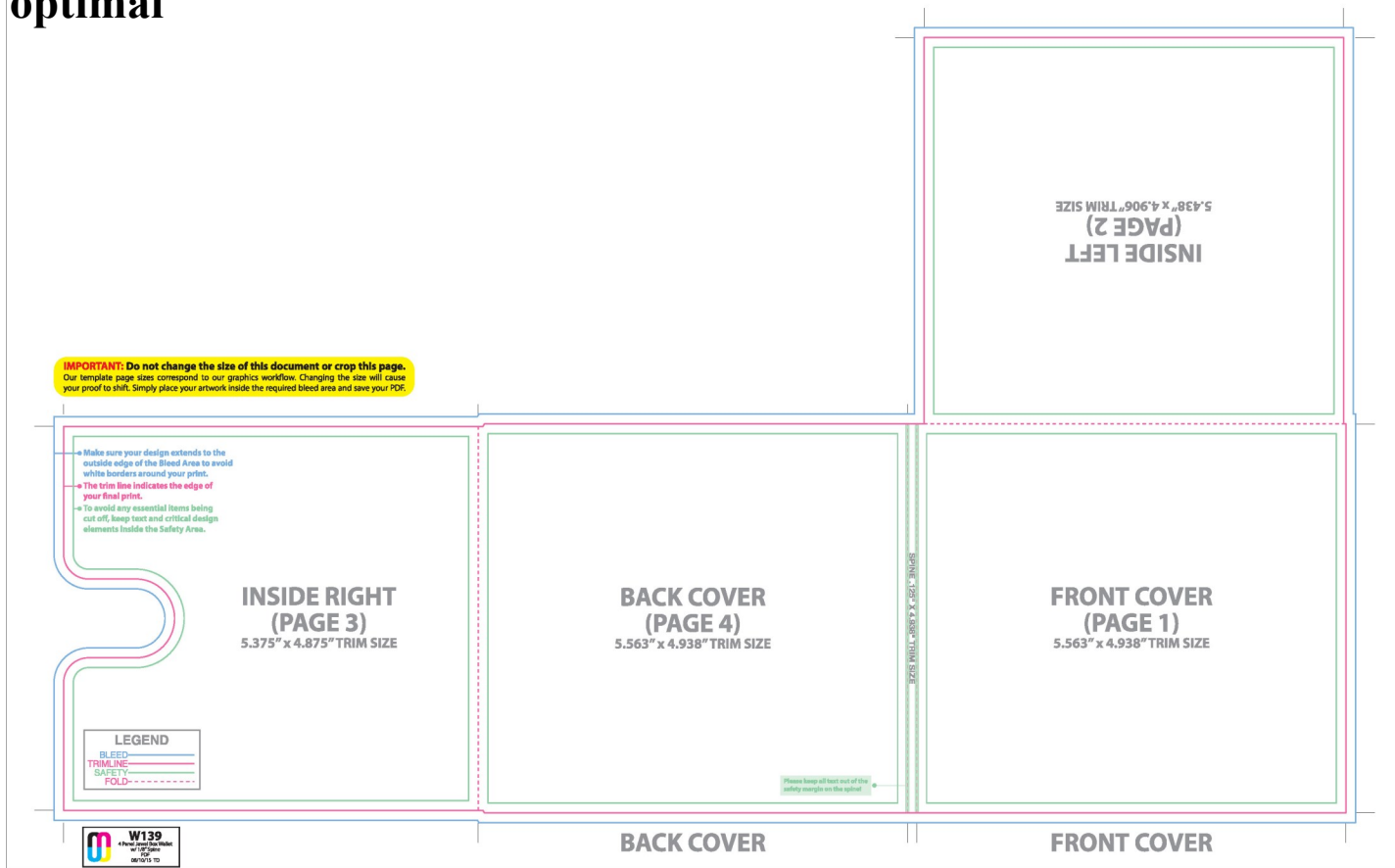
really liked as often as I planned because I kept misplacing it. Scott Cook has succeeded with his unusual approach since the 200 page book is sized to fit on a CD shelf.

- Make the text on the CD package easy to read, especially against colored backgrounds. Designers sometimes forget that practical function and to design for radio. Designers don't know radio promotion.
- CD must be entered into GraceNote via iTunes. Free and easy, but essential. Why? Do you want a screen on a CD player or a dashboard display for radio or CD to read "Unknown Artist"? Most important reason of all, some DJs will not play music that isn't in Gracenote because they use Apple software to prepare their shows.

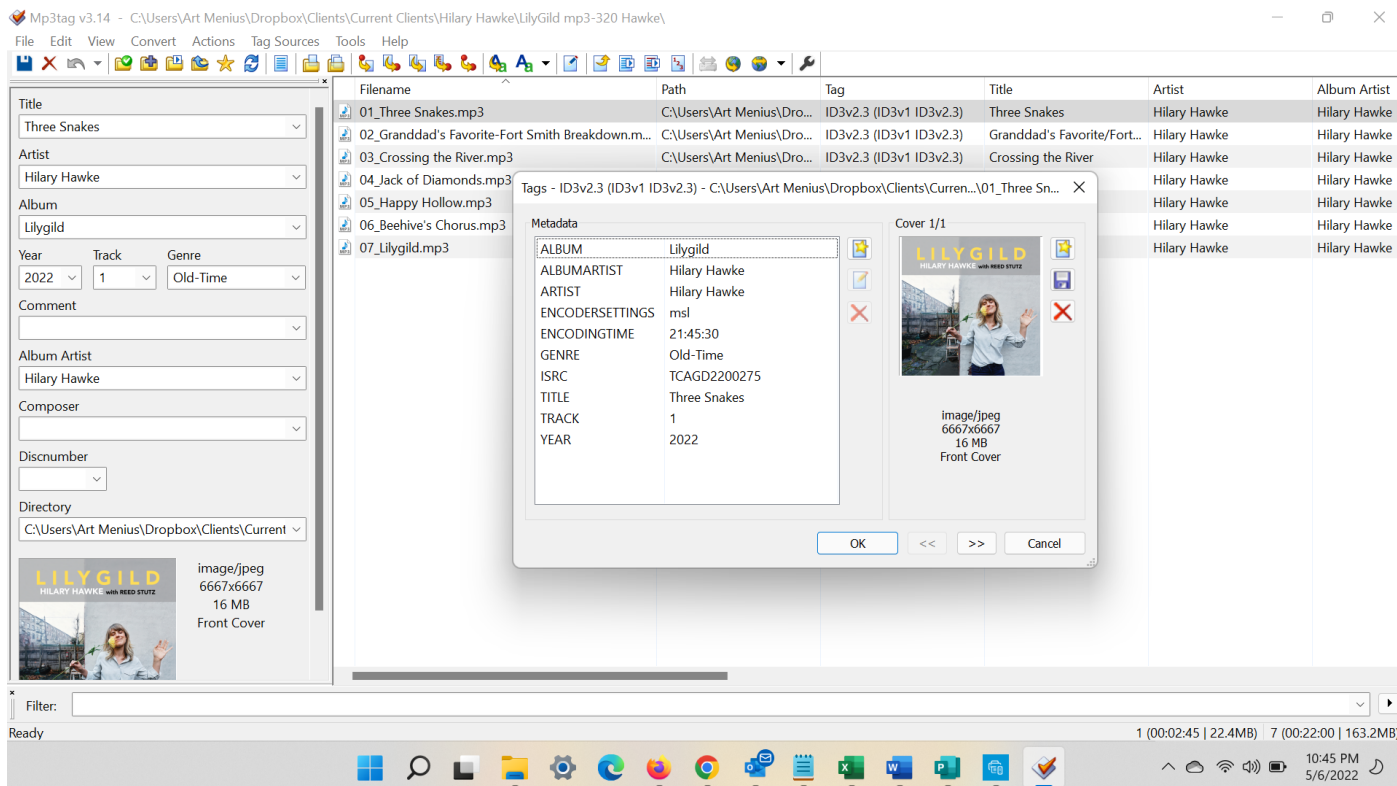




# Schematic for 4-panel CD wallet with 1/8" spine that I consider optimal



# Example of a properly encoded digital music file as viewed in the free metadata editor mp3tag



## For Digital Delivery:

- Allow media downloads with the fewest clicks possible. Set up your own download site with all CD assets and more if available. Don't force users to download both WAV and mp3-320 or to make a second download for the assets. Put all the assets in an mp3 folder and all the assets also in a WAV folder, so that a programmer can download with one click. Read more in Appendix 1.
- Don't secure with DJ copies with passwords. If you have a digital release, it is already on bootleg download sites all over the Net, harvested indiscriminately by lots of bots. Thieves don't buy stuff anyway. That's why they steal.
- Don't ask the DJ to write for a download link. One more reason not to listen to your music. It makes no sense to email a DJ without including a link. Recorded music is no longer a commodity unless you are too famous to be reading this. Seriously, a good case exists just to sell CDs at your shows for a couple of month before release to public and radio.
- Use Bit.ly to create easy to remember URLs (Bit.ly addresses are case sensitive, btw).
- Make digital downloads for radio available when you expect DJs to receive promo CDs.

### Include:

- The audio files as encoded WAV and MP3 320.
- Cover and all other album art as image files
- PDF of liner notes, press releases, the one sheet, and the track card or sheet
- PDF of any CD booklet
- PDF or Word doc of lyrics

Digital files must be fully encoded with artist, song title, album title, album cover, and **ISRC** code. These should be embedded by the mastering engineer. There are free apps to add embedding as **mp3tag**. They work great with mp3, but WAVs are far more problematic, particularly ISRC. Both mp3tag and **Sonoris** can sometimes successfully embed ISRCs in WAV files. Request in your contract that the mastering engineer embed these along with other metadata. You could expect DJs to take the time to enter this information for you, but that is unrealistic as most don't have the time or inclination to do so. Why would a DJ want to enter all that info in order to have one more album to play among the 11,000 tracks she already has as digital files?

Don't use the long, arcane file names often assigned at the mastering studio. Make copies and replace with title of song. Numbers and letters give no idea of the song or artist. Use mp3tag to check and edit the metadata in your digital files. You can use the app to encode MP3-320s perfectly and sometimes WAVs. You can embed the cover and all sorts of information and links.

## Common Blunders Killing Airplay

1. Poor CD design and cheap looking art without easy to read track numbers or durations; no **title or artist name on the spine**. DJs need these. Design mistakes can even raise mailing costs.
2. No one sheet or track card/sheet. Or one-sheets with all hype and nothing about the songs.
3. Essential metadata (the artist and song names, number and, most often, the ISRC) missing.
4. Starting promotion after release to the public
5. Emailing DJs without download links or repurposing commercial download sites.
6. Clogging inboxes by emailing files instead of links.
7. Underpromoting or spreading resources too thin

## Things to Improve Your Chances

1. Put digital versions of everything that comes with the CD in the DJ download plus more.
2. Don't require extra hoops for DJs to download your album such as passwords or writing you for the download link and make the CD packages easy to open without damaging contents.
3. Respect volunteer radio hosts' limited time.
4. Promote in a variety places and media: direct email, folkDJ listserve and Facebook page, Music Meeting Directory, Airplay Direct, Soundcloud.
5. No jewel cases and no digital files lower than MP3-320 nor without metadata.
6. Thank programmers the most and the best.
7. Invest sufficient funds to do the job right.

## Preparing One Sheets and Track Cards or Sheets

These are your primary means for communicating with and enticing folk DJs to check out a recording. They should help a producer select and talk intelligently about songs and albums. These are short pieces designed to interest programmers in the music and provide concise information, not comprehensive statements about artistic process or two pages of hype and bio. One sheets began existence to convince retailers to buy from wholesale distributors. That format doesn't fit the needs of radio hosts.

- Include a one-sheet and either track card or track sheet along with the lyrics in physical and digital formats.
- Track cards are something DJs can keep with a CD, but they require work in layout and concise prose. The alternative, track sheets go on the back side of the one-sheet. They are easier to do, provide more information, and better for digital hosts. Since I greatly prefer track sheets as a DJ, that is what I use as a promoter.
- Whether sheet or card, they tell the DJ in a couple of sentences what the song is about, tempo, and style. The format is: Track number; Title, (duration), sometimes tempo and style, one or two sentences about the song and why included on album. Supply what you want the DJ to say.
- If you are releasing the album yourself, invent a name for your recording company and use it. The optics are better, and optics matter.
- The one sheet should include:
  - Prominent Add Date when you would like airplay to start
  - Cover art
  - Recording label. Even if you invent your own label, the optics are better with one,
  - Contact info
  - Language issues
  - A track listing with number and time, any problematic words flagged, songwriter info if space permits
  - Information about the album, especially the why and how recorded, what it means to the artist with an engaging quotation, maybe highlight a few tracks, and a one paragraph bio.

*Pages 12-13 provide an example of my preferred method combining on the front and back of one 8.5 x 11 page, a one-sheet and a track sheet (rather than card).*

**Below** is the full size obverse of a traditional track card. Small enough to fit into a CD sleeve.

Guy Forsyth & Jeska Bailey **CONSPIRATORS** [www.guyforsyth.com](http://www.guyforsyth.com)

1. **The Things That Matter** (4:07) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps. Played on a National Tri-cone resonator guitar with slide.* Written with Brian David Keane at his home in Nashville after receiving bad news about Stephen Bruton in 15 minutes. Wammo, band member of Asylum Street Spankers, helped craft the third verse. It's a minimalist form, no bridge, just simple prayers.

2. **Pockets** (3:26) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps. Played on a Collings guitar.* Written for Earl and Cathy Farmer, as part of Soulwriter University. Letting go is hard. We live for a moment in between the pull of gravity and spirit, taut as a bowstring till both succeed.

3. **Daddy's Listening** (4:49) *Solo guitar with vocals and foot stomp. Played on a National Tri-cone resonator guitar with slide.* Blues roots and cyberbullying. Written with Jeska Bailey after finding out her conversations with her daughter had been being recorded. Written as therapy, art as revenge, truth to power.

4. **Mercy Now** (5:24) *Solo guitar with voices.* Mary Gauthier penned this masterpiece for her 2005 album. It was named one of the 40 saddest county songs by Rolling Stone. Jeska sends this out to her Father Ron Sheppard. We could all use some mercy now.

5. **Barefoot Waltz** (4:41) *Guitar, Fiddle and voices.* Guy had this song in his pocket for a long time, since just after he moved to Austin. Written for a crush who never slowed down long enough to hear it, he never wanted to record it til he met Jeska. Love means more the second time around. Blind love is the province of youth, now we must love bravely. Warren Hood is true Austin music and his fiddle playing here is all the proof you will ever need.

6. **Nobody Gonna Bail Me Out** (3:31) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps.* Played on a National Reso-rocket resonator guitar. George Rarey (Best Guitar Player in Texas) came up with the riff and I made up the words. Everyone in the world at some point comes to the realization that they are alone, what happens then is character.

# Art Menius Radio One Sheet / Track Sheet Combination

Combines, on the front and back of one 8.5 x 11 sheet, one-sheet and a track sheet (rather than card).



Radio Add Date January 18, 2022

*The Light at the End of the Line*

A new studio album from

## Janis Ian



At 70, Ian is embracing a new milestone: the art of the farewell. Set for release on January 21, 2022 on her own Rude Girl Records, *The Light at the End of the Line* is Ian's latest and likely last studio album to bookend a kaleidoscopic catalog that began with her 1967 self-titled debut. As her first album of new material in 15 years, *The Light at the End of the Line* also sets the stage for what Ian imagines is her final tour.

If *The Light at the End of the Line* ends up being Ian's swan song, it's as graceful an exit as fans could want. "I love this album," she says. "There is an element of, 'This is the absolute best I can do over the span of 58 years as a writer. This is what I've learned. And I realized that this album has an arc, and I've never really done anything like that before.'"

As Ian reflects on a career with its share of hits and misses, it's startling to realize how urgent and out of time her most fearless work remains. We're still having the same conversations around race and racism that Ian ignited in 1966's "Society's Child," her teenage ode to a white woman who brings home a black boyfriend. It was so incendiary that it got banned from radio and led to death threats and public ridicule that scarred its songwriter until she finally untangled the trauma in therapy.

In the age of social media, 1975's "At Seventeen" (from her landmark album *Between the Lines*) is perhaps more resonant than ever as a meditation on feeling isolated and ostracized.

"It's a piece of luck when you can hit on a universal theme like 'At Seventeen,'" she says. "It's what you strive for as a writer. I'm astonished that the song has lived this long, but I'm also horrified that it, and 'Society's Child,' are both still so relevant. I would have hoped that by now so many things would be better."

Ian has taken a circuitous path ever since then, scoring nine Grammy Award nominations and two wins in 1976 for best pop vocal performance-female for "At Seventeen" and in 2013 for best spoken-word album for *Society's Child: My Autobiography*.

Along the way, she has been a columnist and a ringleader of a lively online fan community. She's dabbled in science-fiction writing (squin and you'll see her pal George R.R. Martin, the "Game of Thrones" mastermind, in photos from her 2003 wedding to her wife, Pat). And for the past several years Ian has been devoted to her philanthropic endeavors, the Pearl Foundation and the Better Times Project.

All songs by Janis Ian; © Desperation Publishing (BMI). All songs FCC compliant but see note on reverse re: "Resist."

1.	I'm Still Standing	3:12
2.	Resist	4:29
3.	Stranger	3:04
4.	Swannanoa	3:28
5.	Wherever Good Dreams Go	4:58
6.	Perfect Little Girl	3:18
7.	Nina	3:25
8.	Dancing With the Dark	3:18
9.	Dark Side of the Sun	3:05
10.	Summer In New York	3:23
11.	The Light at the End of the Line	2:50
12.	Better Times Will Come	7:29

Produced by Janis Ian

\* *Resist* produced by Randy Leago & Janis Ian.

\* *Better Times Will Come* produced by Viktor Krauss & Janis Ian.

Radio Promotion

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## Song by Song by Janis

1. I'M STILL STANDING One of the big lessons "At Seventeen" taught me was that it applied to boys and girls, and to all ages. The first time I sang "I'm Still Standing" was for a couple of songwriters in their early 20's. I'd been seeing the song as about myself, older and wiser, saying "I'm still here! Still visible!" But then I watched both of them, male and female, start to tear up and say "Omigosh, that's my song." It was thrilling, to know the song hit a universal.

2. RESIST\*\* The hardest thing for an artist to do as they get older is to keep their edge. You always run the danger of making something "edgy" just for the sake of it, instead of creating something organic to yourself. "The song Resist" took almost five years to finish, because I wanted to get it right. I was uncomfortable with describing women as "sticky", couldn't figure out how to use spoken word without sounding fake (even though the folk and jazz traditions I come from have always used spoken word!), and finally, had no idea how to end it. Once finished, I enlisted Randy Leago's help for the recording, it really came together. I love that lyrically it comes full circle, from the repetitious "She is. She is. She is" to "Resist. Resist. Resist."

\*\*NB: contains "whore" and "Fu-Fu-Fu"

3. STRANGER My grandparents were immigrants, lucky enough to arrive in America when the naturalization process was relatively fast. I've often said "I am the American Dream" –they came here so their children and grandchildren could have the chances they were denied. Most people don't understand how broken our immigration process has become, that it can take ten or more years to just get working papers, let alone become a citizen. So I asked myself two things: How would it be if I suddenly had to leave the place I'd lived in all my life and go back to a country I didn't know? And, if one of my forebears escaped with faked papers and came here to survive, should I be sent back because of it?

4. SWANNANOA When I teach at the Swannanoa Gathering outside Asheville, N.C., I look out every morning on the Swannanoa River Valley, and the mountains around it. Such a rich area, musically and historically. It always feels like the land itself speaks to me, telling stories of the people who've lived there. I've often wondered what it was like to grow up there, maybe 5th or 6th generation, then suddenly have to leave because you were drafted, or thrown out. How homesick you would be! How you'd long for the sight of those trees, those flowers – you'd miss the place as much as the people, maybe even more.

5. WHEREVER GOOD DREAMS GO It's rare that a song grows out of a clear, real event, but I wrote this for a friend who'd lost a child, to say they had every right to grieve. That the memory couldn't, and shouldn't, die. How could you possibly get over something like that? You learn to live with it, but I don't think you ever "get over" it.

6. PERFECT LITTLE GIRL I went to see fellow songwriter Cidny Bullens in a one-man show about his transition from Cindy Bullens, born female, to Cid Bullens, male. One thing he said hit me very hard – that one day he'd realized he would always be trapped in a female body. Forever. Silly as it sounds, I remember waking up one morning and realizing I was now too old for Peter Pan to knock on my window and teach me to fly. It was a huge loss for me, because somewhere in my heart, I'd believed that one day, I would be able to fly. It's important to recognize those sacred places inside us, and acknowledge them. It's vital. I started the song when I got home that night, and finished it the next day.

7. NINA "Nina" began with the introduction, which I'd play on guitar every night as I waited to go onstage. Lyrics began popping into my head, and I thought, "I do not want to write a song about Nina Simone!" Outside of being arguably the greatest all-around female musician, band leader, arranger, interpreter, performer I've ever seen, we'd been friends, and it was not easy being friends with Nina. Quite the opposite. Still, as I wrote, I kept coming back to Nina. So I finally gave in and concentrated on making it live up to her power and brilliance, without shying away from her other issues. As a lyricist, I think this is the best piece on the album. It's a complicated piece, but then again, Nina was a complicated soul.

8. DANCING WITH THE DARK We've all got those days, don't we? Especially in the time of Covid, when it's just too much, and we want to take all our burdens and throw them into the sea, then let the tide carry them away. I've felt like that a lot these past few years, overwhelmed with business, overwhelmed with relationships, overwhelmed by life.

9. DARK SIDE OF THE SUN I can't remember when the idea of writing a song from Lucifer's point of view took root in my head, but I do remember wondering if he was happy with the choice he'd made. Looking back at what he'd been, realizing he'd never be able to redeem himself. Having to live without the golden world he'd always taken for granted. And yet, still angry, still arrogant, insisting he was right all along. So much duality; what a fascinating character. Stella Adler used to tell us that you had to have sympathy for

every character you played, to see the whole of them; I tried to see Lucifer's pain and regrets, as well as his bravado.

10. SUMMER IN NEW YORK I grew up on all kinds of jazz – Billie Holiday, Coltrane, Spivey, Monk – and I've always loved writing in that vein. One day I found myself missing New York so much! I grew up in Jersey, so there was always the wistfulness of looking across the river, part of the City and yet not. Then we moved, and I loved everything from the way steam rises from the asphalt in summer, to block parties I'd sneak into. Randy's clarinet manages to evoke Gershwin and the elevated train all at once. I love how sparse this piece is; it takes a lifetime to learn what not to write or play, and how important it is to leave space.

11. THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE LINE It took decades to get over the trauma of "Society's Child", the violence and hatred I was subjected to when it came out. Part of the healing was deciding to stay after shows, meeting and connecting with my audience. Once I realized I was going to stop doing that, I wanted to tell them how much I love them. It sounds corny, but there it is.

12. BETTER TIMES WILL COME Two days after John Prine died, I was doing laundry and found myself singing "Better times. Better times will come". Pretty soon the rest of the chorus came. I wrote the verses waiting for the clothes to dry, then sang it into my phone. That started the Better Times Project ([bettertimeswillcome.com](http://bettertimeswillcome.com)). Artists of all sorts joined in, until I had close to 200 different versions in everything from Mandarin Chinese to Dutch sign language, drawing books, videos, collages. I put up a new version every day for months, and people in lock-down wrote to say it helped them to face each new day. When I recorded it for this album, I wanted my part to stay true to that first a capella version, but then grow into something broader. I called Viktor Krauss, my favorite bass player, and asked him to co-produce something that would "show the times we've been living through". We went through our mental Rolodexes, enlisting friends like Diane Schuur and Vince Gill, Jim Hoke and John Cowan. The direction was "Don't hold back!" and that's just what we got. For me, this piece illustrates the arc of fear, isolation, hope, relief, and then return to fear we keep going through as we deal with this scourge. And it's a tribute to all the artists who continue to do our work, offering audiences an escape and a bit of joy, even as we've watched our own professions disintegrate under the weight of it all.

# The Art Menius Radio Promotion Process from the DJ Perspective

I built my practice as a folk radio promoter on what I considered the best practices as a DJ receiving promotion. This gives me a somewhat different orientation than one who approached radio promotion from an artist, manager, or journalism background. **I promote to others they way I want others to promote to me.**

I start the process by negotiating a Letter of Agreement (LOA) with the label, management, or artist that specifies who is to do what when. The contract memorializes our plan and timeline in a written agreement — a roadmap for both parties. Although I have packages, I offer great flexibility, the example steps below assume a full promotion.

Next, I receive raw text from the artist which I use to compose the one sheet and track sheet, which goes on its back side. Once the artist approves, we have the basic text ready for the campaign. That basic text provides the first story I have to tell programmers. The more new stories I have to tell each week, the more I can push the release. Reviews, chart positions, video premieres, features, major live events all provide stories for me to tell, keeping the release fresh. This is where publicists have the potential to be so valuable to me.

I manually go through my collection of more than 750 snail mail address in the database I have maintained since August 1984 to prepare a mailing list of those programmers who need CDs at the number upon which we agreed in the LOA. I print the one sheets here, then we stuff the envelopes and label and meter the packets using Stamps.com, which affords a discounted rate. I can mail a 4-panel wallet with 1/8 inch spine at \$1.83, less than half a thicker digipak or jewel case. The lowest first class rate requires that the package can pass through automated scanning. I get them in the post between two and three weeks prior to the add date.

Roughly ten days before the add date, I check the encoding in the digital files, upload them with all available assets to my download system, MediaFire. The MP3 and WAV folders each contain the full set so that one only needs to download once. I include project name in the folder names so that those appear on the downloaders end. DJs have hundreds of folders named WAV and MP3-320 which aren't helpful names. I also place the recording, using WAVs, in SoundCloud for private media streaming.

No later than 8 days in advance, I put the release (MP3-320 only) in my AirPlay Direct label account including lyrics, track notes, and bio and in the Music Meeting Directory DISCO system (WAV only) with all assets. Most labels and some independent promoters fail to include the latter nor to use useful file and folder names.

The Tuesday before the add date, a release makes the first of three appearances in my weekly new release eblast to more than 1100 programmer addresses. The message includes two to three paragraphs adapted from the one sheet along with download, AirPlay Direct, and SoundCloud links. The same information appears that day in an individual post on the FolkDJ listserv. Within 24 hours, I use the DPK feature of AirPlay Direct to blast more than 900 programmers.

Friday brings my weekly illustrated newsletter that goes into much greater depth and out to the same list of more than a thousand addresses. Unlike Tuesday's stripped down new release blast, Friday's newsletter includes everything I am currently promoting, recurrent releases still charting, and a list of upcoming releases.

Among the twice weekly blasts, I make secondary FolkDJ posts (the more news and events, the more I can post, which is how publicists help my work greatly), and APD DPK blasts. This is when I need a constant stream of new stories to tell.

The focus after the first Tuesday announcement, however, falls on tracking airplay through multiple sources, thanking DJs (and thus keeping in touch), and reporting to the client, with a final report of songs played when and where and by whom following the end of the campaign as specified in the LOA.

## Following Up on a Release: Tracking and Thanking

### 1) How to track airplay:

- FolkDJ playlists or archives where you can search by name.
- Spintron.com/search - a system for logging airplay to comply with needs of SoundExchange under the DMCA - always free searching of all airplay registered with it over the most recent 24 hours with option to pay for longer. You can also go back months in the individual show pages. Most data comes from college, tribal, and community stations. Spintron is a wonderful tool for discovering new programmers.
- NACC Folk Chart - those who subscribe with the \$50/month half-price deal via FAI can get weekly spreadsheet downloads of folk airplay and adds reported over one-week periods by station. The reports, however, only include the top ten from each reporting station.
- <https://xmplaylist.com> where one can search the past 60 days of plays on SiriusXM radio.
- APD lets you download a spreadsheet of the stations which downloaded your recordings.
- Individual station and host playlists online.
- Google searches for artist and title
- Direct communications with DJs.

2) Thanking hosts for airplay is the best practice for follow up and the way to build and maintain relationships. She who thanks best gets the most airplay. The appreciation reinforces and builds upon itself over time and lets hosts upon themselves over time.

- As you track, send thank you messages to DJs who play your music. Keep them brief until you get to know them. Some DJs want to be emailed; some to get phone calls; and some want to be left alone. Knowing this is another advantage that promoters have.
- Offer liners (station IDs) and interviews as an additional way to both interact and promote.
- Keep records of your airplay to help with future promotions
- Remember that this process is all about building durable relationships with hosts for the future.

### 3) Follow up with programmers who haven't played your music using quiet, patient persistence.

- Keep pushing your message without appearing pushy by getting personal or impatient. You'll get much better results simply resending your announcement message as if he had not seen it than asking the DJ whether they have received it.
- Don't put DJs on the spot by pushing for a clear yes - no answer. Effective promoters at the most just put the thought out there that a certain song might fit the DJ's show, but doesn't ask for a response.
- Programmers know what fits their show a lot better than you do. You can convince a DJ to listen, but playing your song on air is their choice.
- DJs may not get to your music for weeks. Accept that as fact about which you can do nothing. Asking if the programmer has heard the record yet does not expedite listening; it just makes you sound impatient.

I appreciate you reading this far. That's my overview of folk radio promotion and whether you should hire a promoter. I trust you found it helpful.

The information continues with appendices followed by an extensive glossary.

Thanks for reading,



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# Appendix 1: Setting Yourself Up for Digital Delivery

## Your Download Site

Include both MP3-320 (never use anything less) and WAV files of the music, and digital files of all assets. Do not try to repurpose commercial download sites by imposing passwords. Soundcloud and BandCamp are not good platforms for media downloads. Similarly, download cards have a utility at real world events, but otherwise adapting a retail sales platform to deliver music to radio programmers is a fairly common, but bad, practice. It requires a code and extra effort for DJs, always a mistake, including a code. And it doesn't make DJs feel special.

**Dropbox, Box, and MediaFire**, which I use, offer the most flexibility, easy to use for uploader and downloader, and fairly inexpensive. Dropbox, of course, offers many more functions than file sharing. I prefer, therefore, MediaFire because file sharing is all it does rather than replacing your hard drive or facilitating online collaborative work. That leaves MediaFire simpler, more straightforward on either end. **Google Drive** offers similar functionality with more bells, whistles, and options, but it is not as intuitive as the other two for the downloader.

**DISCO**, used by Music Meeting Directory (see below), is the fastest, slickest, and simplest. It, however, doesn't allow separating WAVs and MP3 files and gives downloads quarter mile long filenames which Windows Explorer truncates into something unintelligible.

## Digital Service Providers (DSPs) for Radio Downloads

**AirPlay Direct (APD)** is the best known and most often used service of this class in roots radio. For bluegrass and blues APD is absolutely essential and additional investment may well work. APD is not, however, all the promotion one needs to do in those genre anymore than one post on FolkDJ is a campaign. For folk it is useful and should be used every time, but doesn't pack the impact it does with blues and bluegrass. You can download a spreadsheet from AirPlay Direct of everyone who downloaded, which is excellent. Don't use Airplay Direct, however, as your primary or only download site. It is password protected, requires more keystrokes to download, and doesn't deliver assets completely or in native format.

**Music Meeting Directory** uses DISCO to service NACC Charts reporters of all their formats. Currently it is free for promoters and labels who subscribe to the NACC Folk Chart (\$50 per month. Another cost promoters can spread over many releases.)

**playMPE** allows a good deal of customization and avoids most spam and promotions filters. For a charge of around \$600, one can blast a song to pretty much all Americana, AAA, and NonComm. An album is, I believe, costs three times more. Used little if any for folk radio, it is essential for AAA and Americana.

## Streaming Services for Radio

I use **Soundcloud** to deliver private streams to radio. I find it efficient and attractive with unlimited uploads and a bit of branding possible on the page. Most important to me, one click takes a programmer to the private stream. You can pay a bit more to have branding on your pages.

By contrast, **APD's** streaming requires the host to log in. By the time she is listening, the DJ has clicked thrice rather than once.

Similarly, with **Spotify**, the user has to log in or listen with ads. Again, it doesn't make the programmer feel validated as a professional industry member.



## Appendix 2: Using Videos

A video adds potential reach of any part of the project. I consider one nearly essential to, if not synonymous with, a single release. Videos provide an additional tool, along with reviews, to use in promotion. Consider that YouTube is the most important place for music discovery today more than radio and more than even Spotify, Pandora, Tik-Tok, or Soundcloud. That is how the video should be prioritized especially for time, effort, and creativity. In addition, video premieres get you coverage on a major website that reaches far beyond your own resources.

The better the video, potentially the bigger the outlet. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive, just a creative piece of art that complements or augments the music version. The internet is stuffed with videos of full band performing. The more it is just a video of a band playing, the less its marketability to outlets that reach new fans. It can even be as little as a creative approach to presenting the musicians playing, however. Bruce Molsky and David Holt made an amazing one by using drone shots of them playing high up on a mountain. While not a concert video, the artist should be featured in it, most usually playing and singing but also acting. Having some kind of narrative through path produces a better product.

Use the natural and manmade assets of your location. You can find interesting locations wherever you live. Your local theatre community contains skilled actors, often at the same career level as you. Somebody you know has a drone that can carry a camera.

Once you have the video completed and on YouTube - unlisted until going public for the debut - begin pitching it to the major roots music websites that still do video or song premieres. Create a priority list and work down it until you reach the best outlet that will debut your video. That is easy to say, but much easier for professionals, in this specific case the publicist if you have one, with established relationships to do.

Examples of simple, creative, relatively inexpensive videos:

<https://youtu.be/FaqZdpqDWbw> which features the band playing but in an unusual location with creative camera work

<https://youtu.be/AYJA42hcPpY> again the duo playing but with elements of the song happening behind and around them

<https://youtu.be/czMNCRouEBM> mixes a little new footage, stills, and "found footage."

During 2020 Jesse Palidofsky released a produced video to accompany his updating of "America the Beautiful" with Claire Lynch and Lea Gillmore. The video surpassed 64,000 views. The song reached #2 on the FAI Folk Chart.

Si Kahn recorded himself sitting in front of his PC camera singing "Yo! Semite!," organically it has earned 31,000 views with the lightly promoted song landing at #15 on the same chart.



## **Appendix 3: A Good Practices Timeline**

### **At least six months before intended radio add date**

Material chosen, Rough mixes ready to recruit team

Release and add dates established

If desired, engage a radio promoter, a publicist, as well as other team members if affordable

If not hiring professionals, make plan for promotion yourself

### **At least four months Out**

CD package graphics reviewed for optimal radio friendliness.

Final masters completed

Design completed

CD send out for pressing

### **At least three months in advance**

Graphics finalized

One sheet completed

CDs manufactured

Promo CDs mailed to reviewers and feature editors so that print is synchronized to release.

### **8 weeks before**

If desired, first video finished and placed on YouTube unlisted. Video shopped for a premier with artist supplying a quote about both song and video.

### **Six weeks before**

CDs arrive where they will be shipped out

All graphic and PDF files ready to use in downloads and one sheets.

Rough text for one sheet and 2 to 3 sentences about each song for track card or sheet composed

### **Four weeks before**

Drop advance single if desired

One sheets and track cards or sheets printed

All assets and audio files ready for download and streaming

CD distribution list finished

### **Three weeks before**

CDs in the mail to radio

Private stream shared with radio

### **Two weeks before add date**

Put in NACC's Going for Adds listings

Album available for download and streaming by radio on Tuesday promoted by direct email and folkDJ listserv.

### **1 week before radio add date**

Downloads put in Music Meeting Directory Going for Adds system before Thursday if NACC subscriber. Album available on AirPlay Direct (APD). APD release by sending the DPK it generates to all your DJ emails

Direct email to programmers with download, streaming, and APD links.

### **Radio Add Date (aka radio release date) always a Tuesday**

Direct email to DJs

FolkDJ post

FolkDJ Facebook page post

Video or album premier on popular website

Included in Music Meeting Directory Going For Adds download service sent to all NACC reporters

### **Radio Add Week**

Tracking and thanking for airplay begins and continues until end of promotion

Album pushed each week on direct email until end of campaign

Engagement with DJs ongoing

Positive quotes and reviews used liberally on going

### **Three weeks after**

Second APD DPK blast and FolkDJ post

Folk DJ listserv post

Second video release if desired

### **Six to ten weeks after**

Active tracking and promotion winds down

## **Glossary**

*AAA:* Adult Album Alternative is a format that developed in late 1980s and evolved into a mixture of album oriented rock, alternative, and singer-songwriter. Some artists appear on AAA, folk, Non-Comm, and Americana charts.

*Album:* A collection of seven or more tracks regardless of release format

*Americana Radio:* Americana is a radio format developed in the 1990s which has evolved into “country music that doesn’t suck,” but does have a strong Nashville/Austin orientation.

*Assets or Media Assets:* In short, the digital version of everything you would get with the physical product, including those only sent to media: all album artwork as hi-res image files, PDFs of liner notes, lyrics, and booklet, bios, one sheets, track cards (or sheets).

*CD:* Compact disc. A form of physical media that can include one to roughly two dozen songs. The audio data is stamped into freshly made discs.

*CD-R:* A limited run, limited packaging CD produced primarily for servicing radio as a single, an advance release, or for a project with no commercial CD version. CD-R data is recorded on a blank disc manufactured for that purpose.

*College Radio:* Since these stations usually receive institutional support, they offer the most experimental and diverse locally produced radio at any power from internet only to 25KW. While some have stable professional management or long-established adult hosts, maintaining steady relationships or even current information proves a formidable challenge with student run stations where hosts can change with the semesters.

*Community Radio:* The broadest form of non-commercial

(NCE) radio, community radio can resemble college in the breadth of its radio produced by local hosts or public radio with syndicated programming from Public Radio Exchange (PRX) and Pacifica Audioport (Pacifica’s “Democracy Now” is the bedrock of many community stations’ fundraising). Community radio ranges from powerhouse stations like KBCS in Seattle that resemble NPR stations in staffing and public affairs to 5KW full power community stations with the minimum 5 full-time employees required for CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) funding to low power stations limited to 100 watts. The latter can range from fifty or more unpaid hosts and occasionally a paid employee, to just one-person operating an automated station in a rural community.

*EP:* Extended Play as contrasted to Long Play album (LP). Now a recording project consisting usually of three to six tracks regardless of format. Historically a 7 inch vinyl record with two songs per side.

*Gracenote:* Apple’s database for identifying music on a compact disc in a CD player, Gracenote provides the information about artist, song, and album on your audio display. One can enter information into Gracenote easily just using iTunes on a PC or MAC with CD drawer.

*Internet Radio:* Consists of both the streams from over-the-air (OTA) terrestrial stations (those that broadcast over the airwaves) and of internet-only stations. Those span the gamut from commercial operations that mimic satellite radio with multiple channels and genre, to those that operate one stream just as if it were a conventional station, to one-person, one-show-a-week outlets that may be part of an aggregator. All American stations playing recorded music on the Internet are subject to regulations and fees from the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which created Sound Exchange as the 4<sup>th</sup> PRO to collect

and distribute these royalties to people who perform on recordings.

*International Standard Recording Code (ISRC):* A unique and permanent identifier for a specific recording, independent of the format on which it appears (CD, audio file, vinyl, etc.). ISRCs are widely used in digital commerce by download sites and PROs. An ISRC can also be permanently encoded into a product as its digital fingerprint. Encoded ISRCs provide the means to automatically identify recordings for royalty payments.

*Metadata:* For properly encoded music files, the metadata provides the essential information identifying it: Artist, Track #, Title, Album, Album Artist, Recording Label, IRSC, even Songwriting & Publishing, if you want to. The first five fields are the essential ones used by Spinritron at more than 200 stations to autogenerate playlists and reports required by the DMCA. Metadata can be embedded easier in mp3 files.

*Music Director:* The person or persons who screen music for airplay at a station. Some, especially in college radio, may have individual format MDs. In commercial radio, MDs (or music committees) control what is played. In community and college, MDs are much more about screening music to the right hosts or programs and programming automation for when no live host is available. Community radio hosts, which are a majority of folk radio programmers, often act as their own MDs, which is why we send so many CDs to individuals and, to the chagrin of labels, multiple CDs to the same station.

*Non-Comm Radio:* Is largely AAA radio on college and community radio.

*One-Sheets:* Originally conceived to convince wholesalers and retailers to order LPs, one-sheets now mostly provide background information to programmers to decide whether to give the recording a chance. They also help DJs to sound knowledgeable and to select songs. They include on the obverse release and add dates, basic information and credits, back story about the album, and some bio information. If you use a track sheet rather than a track card, for convenience, it would appear on the reverse of the one-sheet.

*Program Director:* The person who determines what shows are on the station. The PD decides whether folk is aired; the MD what folk music is aired.

*Public Radio in the USA:* Not synonymous with all or even most non-commercial or listener supported radio, “public radio” specifically refers to the largest and best funded non-commercial radio stations which are affiliates of National Public Radio (NPR). Before public radio standardization

began 30 years ago, these were bulwark stations for presenting folk music to large, affluent audiences. While some locally produced shows remain on public radio, folk programming there has become dominated by a handful of nationally and regionally distributed programs such as “American Routes,” “Mountain Stage,” “Blues Caravan,” “Thistle & Shamrock,” and “Folk Alley.”

*Publicist:* Someone whose business is promoting artists to media including reviews, articles in print and web outlets, and TV appearances. A different (and more expensive) specialty and set of relationships than radio promotion, although these efforts should support and reinforce each other. Since they work with publications, the publicist’s work starts several weeks earlier than radio.

*Radio Add Date:* This is the Tuesday when you want radio to start playing your new music. Radio should have the downloads and CDs before this date. Sometimes this is the same as the public release date, but normally it’s ten days to three weeks before. Often the two dates are conflated.

*Release Date:* The release date, now a Friday, is a holdover from the days of actual retail music sales. It was the day when recordings went on sale. Nowadays, it is supposed to be the day the album goes on sale and streaming to the public.

*Satellite Radio in the USA:* Is for all intents and purposes, SiriusXM. Because of the national reach of its folk and bluegrass programming, they carry a great impact on weighted charts and national exposure.

*Single:* The release of an individual song by video, streaming, download, CD, or a mixture thereof.

*Track Card or Sheet:* Documents formatted as the names suggest, with track number, time, tempo or style, FCC compliance information, and one or two sentences about each selection. Track sheets most often go on the reverse of one-sheets, while cards are inserted into the CD sleeve.

## A 12-Step Program for Recording Promotion

1. Admit you are helpless concerning the results of a promotion understanding that all you can control is how you do it. Most good records aren't hits.
2. Realize that promotions need to be focused on specific genre with a separate radio promoter for each format not a scattershot effort since the different formats operate in different way.
3. Plan the recording promotion from the very beginning, not after the release
4. Make a searching and fearless inventory of the mistakes made in past promotions and plan so as not to repeat them.
5. Make sure the design of the CD is optimized for radio
6. Appreciate every programmer who listens at all to your music giving it a chance to get on the air.
7. Make amends to each DJ to whom you sent a 15 MB mp3-192 as an email attachment with the file totally unencoded with a file name like fnl.mstr,64.8.1.2021.mp3 or failed to put durations and track numbers on the back of the CD.
8. Build authentic relationships with hosts one by one. This is a personal relationship driven, retail business.
9. Be persistent but never appear pushy or put a DJ on the spot about playing a song or album.
10. Make things as easy as possible for the radio programmers to obtain, screen, and play your music.
11. Keep careful records of who plays the records
12. Thank the most and the soonest.

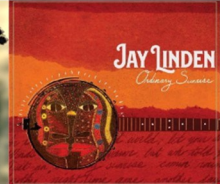
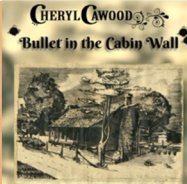
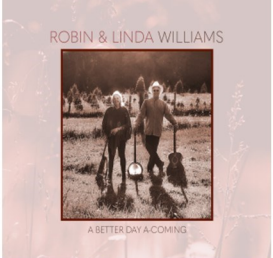
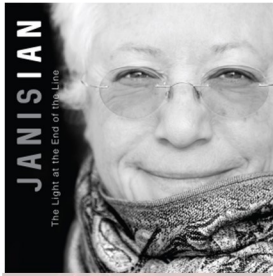


**About the Author:** Art Menius built Art Menius Radio (<https://artmeniusradio.com>) into one the top three folk music promotion outfits in just 3 years after its January 2015 launch, Menius has promoted multiple #1 albums, artists, & songs on the Folk Alliance International (FAI) Folk Chart and #1 releases & adds on the NACC Folk Chart. He promoted the *Bluegrass Today* chart topping release for all of 2021 and has enjoyed top tens on the *Bluegrass Unlimited* chart despite not being a bluegrass promoter. He was the first employee of both the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) (1985-1990) and FAI (1991-1996) and the first president of the latter in 1990. He spent 11 years (1997-2007) as Associate Festival Director for MerleFest, later serving as Director of famed institutions Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY and The ArtsCenter in Carrboro, NC. Menius is the only person to have served on the boards of FAI (new term starting 2023), IBMA, and the Americana Music Association. He received IBMA's Distinguished Achievement Award (2007) and was inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame (2008). Currently on WHUP (Hillsborough, NC), he has also hosted shows on Appalshop's WMMT, WCOM (Carrboro, NC), & WCHL (Chapel Hill, NC).

## Some of the Trouble I've Seen (Including Some of My Gaffes)

- Illegible CD cover, liner notes, or one sheet due to fonts, colors, or backgrounds
- One sheet sent as a PowerPoint or image file
- One sheets that are all hype, no info about the release
- Broken jewel case—many are—holding a broken CD, no CD, or a blank CD
- Digital assets in a format only Apple can use
- A one sheet that moves close to porn territory
- Digital files lacking metadata or identifying info so that they get lost rather than played.
- Metal CD sent to an old-time string band show
- Packages so difficult to open that you tear the one sheet or the CD sleeve or just give up.
- CD spine without info defeating its purpose
- F-bomb in lyrics with no warning or without supplying an edit you can play.
- Different song titles on the CD, package, or one sheet; titles in wrong order; wrong durations
- Lack of clarity as to whether artist name or song title
- CDs mailed to DJs who have been gone for years
- A sleeveless, unlabeled CD in a plain cardboard mailer without a one sheet or sticker
- Being made to register for a platform or use a password in order to download a promo recording.
- Meaningless file and folder names like WAV, fnl.mstr,64.8.1.2021.mp3, or Track 3.

# Your one-stop shop for folk radio promotion and mailings



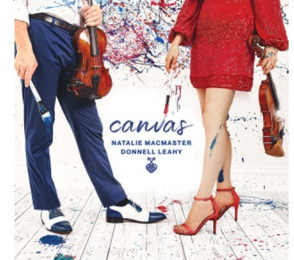
Radio Promotion by  
Art Menius  
Radio and  
Mailing Service



artmeniusradio.com

art@artmenius.com

443-605-4355



## Art Menius Radio offers:

- ◆ Flexible, creative options for any budget
- ◆ Promotional campaigns & mailing lists customized for your needs
- ◆ Full promotion to North American folk radio including mailing and one sheet printing
- ◆ Also offering printing and mailing to individually curated lists without promotion

"Art did an absolutely wonderful job promoting my album to folk radio for a very reasonable fee, with terrific results. He laid out everything he would do beforehand in a clear way and did exactly what he promised, plus he talked me through lots of tech stuff about promotion I needed to do myself that was incomprehensible to me. I highly recommend him and his services. Plus he's a lovely guy to boot." - **Lucy Kaplansky**



### Folk Alliance International Chart 2023:

2 #1 albums, 2 #1 songs  
29 Top Twenty albums; 5 Top Ten songs  
31 charted songs, 41 charted albums

### NACC Folk Chart 2023

Five Top Ten releases  
Sixteen Top 30 releases  
Seventeen #1 most added