

Cynthia Daniels

RECORDING ENGINEER

Take a listen to your favorite CD. Pay attention to the vocals, instruments, and the balance between them. In the CD credits, the person responsible for making everything sound so great and well-blended is the recording engineer. If you think this is an easy job, Cynthia Daniels is here to fill you in on how challenging it can be. Becoming a recording engineer was particularly tricky for Cynthia because in the 1970s, when she was looking for colleges that offered recording engineering, there weren't any! But she "did anything to stay in it," and her perseverance helped her become one of the biggest recording engineers in the biz. How big? Well, Cynthia won a 2001 Grammy for her work on the Broadway cast album for *The Producers*—one of the most popular musicals on Broadway today. So take notes as Cynthia gives you the real deal on her cool career.



By Veronica Dominguez

How did you get started as a recording engineer?

I was looking at the back of a record and saw this credit for "recording engineer" that looked pretty interesting. Because colleges at that time didn't feature recording engineering, I went to school for broadcast and film in Boston, and in the summers, I went to the Institute of Audio Research in New York. In Boston, I mixed live sound at a jazz club. Then I interned at a recording studio and hooked up with a mobile recording company and ended up going around the country recording for ABC Radio. I thought I knew everything I needed to know, but I came to New York and started at the bottom again at a big recording studio [laughs]. Phil Ramone, one of the studio owners and a legendary producer, was one of my mentors—that was my best education.

What does a recording engineer actually do?

I'm responsible for everything from choosing microphones to

running the actual recording session. I set up the mics, make headphone mixes, get balances for the musicians and control room, record overdubs, and create the final mix. My job is to make it sound like a complete record, where all the instruments and vocals are heard perfectly and the sound is appropriate to the genre. Rock, for example, would require big drums, heavy bass, and cool, hip vocals, while a cast album with a 60-piece orchestra has to sound like a show. I channel the artist's vision using technical expertise and a lot of creative input. Getting a good sound requires everything from knowledge of microphones to the ability to make artists comfortable in the studio.

Is there a specific genre that you like working with?

I work with a lot of different genres. I've recorded a lot of TV music: game shows, soap operas, news, and sports. I've done many Broadway cast albums, as well as orchestral work. I spent last summer recording the London

Symphony Orchestra and Chaka Khan. It's really hard to say which I prefer because, personally, I really love rock but most of my experience is with orchestral music, acoustic music, big bands, and jazz.

What makes a good recording engineer?

A recording engineer is someone who understands how music is supposed to sound. It's really

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important to be able to get good sound and understand the technology of how to do that. It takes talent and years of practice. But a good recording engineer, I always say, is one-third technician, one-third musician, and one-third politician. You have to know when to be hands-off and when to be involved, ready to wear any of those three hats at any moment.

What advice do you have for someone who wants to pursue this career?

Start early—become an intern and keep your ears open, literally. 