



# MUSIC

## PUBLISHING 101

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*Making the most  
money from your music.*



**As a songwriter**, you're owed money whenever the music you've written is purchased, streamed, covered, played on the radio, performed in public, heard on YouTube, sampled, sold as sheet music, or used as the soundtrack to a film, TV show, commercial, video game, or presentation

Today, songwriters have more opportunities than ever to make significant income from their songs. Music publishing plays a large role in that equation, but it's also one of the least understood aspects of the music industry.



Access doesn't equal understanding; and just because an independent songwriter CAN make money from publishing these days doesn't mean they know HOW to do it. That's where CD Baby's "Music Publishing 101" comes in!

In this guide we'll outline the basics and clarify a few of the more confusing aspects of music publishing. So let's get started...

## What is music publishing?

"Music publishing is the **owning** and **exploiting** of songs in the form of musical **copyrights**."

– Randall Wixen, *The Plain and Simple Guide to Music Publishing*

In most aspects of life, "exploitation" is a bad thing, but in the music industry, exploiting musical copyright is very, very good! It means that the owner of a particular composition (the music and the lyrics) is putting that song to use in a way that generates money in the form of:

- mechanical royalties
- performance royalties
- licenses for synchronization
- licenses for sampling
- and print rights for sheet music

## So what is a musical copyright anyway?

Copyright is a designation of intellectual property similar to a patent or trademark. Once an original composition has been fixed in a medium from which it can be reproduced (having either been recorded or written down in some fashion), the composer is granted exclusive rights to that piece of music, including:

- the right to reproduce the song
- the right to distribute the song
- the right to perform the song
- The right to create derivative works

**FUN FACT:** *Speaking of sheet music, that's exactly how this whole business first came to be called music publishing — because back before the advent of recording and radio, publishing sheet music was one of the only ways to earn money from a musical copyright.*

One of the keys to music publishing is the fact that every recorded piece of music has two separate copyrights (which are not always owned or exploited by the same persons or parties).

**These two separate copyrights are:**

**1. The composition itself** — a song's music and lyrics, apart from any particular recording of that composition. This copyright is owned by the songwriter and/or publisher.

**2. The sound recording** — a particular recorded version of a musical composition. This copyright is owned by the recording artist and/or label.

Music publishing involves the exploitation of the first of those forms of copyright.

## Who owns your publishing rights and how does the money get split?

If you're a songwriter, and you've not signed a deal with a music publishing company — you do! You are considered both the songwriter AND the publisher. **You are owed both shares (50% for the songwriter, and 50% for the publisher) of any mechanical royalties, performance royalties, or licenses that your songs generate.** However, it's up to you to exploit the copyright to your compositions, and it's up to you to collect the royalty payments.

The second part of that equation is decidedly easier than the first, so it is often beneficial to work with an established music publisher who can (either for a fixed period of time or in perpetuity) help you find opportunities to earn money from your songs.

What does the publisher get out of the bargain? As mentioned above, a typical royalty split between

the songwriter and the publisher is 50/50 — but 50% is a small price to pay if they're using their publishing expertise to generate big income from the exploitation of your copyright.

## Where does the money come from in music publishing?

Ever wonder why the main songwriter in one of those megastar bands from the 70's could afford three mansions when the other guys in band could only buy one house? Well, music publishing has the potential to generate big money for songwriters. Here's how:

**Mechanical royalties** — As a songwriter/publisher, you are owed a royalty every time your composition is reproduced (on vinyl, tape, CD, MP3, etc). The mechanical royalty is generally equal to 9.1 cents per reproduced copy (regardless of whether those albums or singles are sold).

This is true whether another artist is covering your song or if you're recording them yourself. (Though if you're acting as your own label, you'll basically be paying that royalty to yourself).

**Performance royalties** — As a songwriter/publisher, you are owed a royalty whenever your compositions are performed "in public." This includes:

- plays on terrestrial and satellite radio (Sirius, KEXP, etc.)
- usage on network and cable TV
- plays on internet radio
- online music streaming (Spotify, Pandora, etc.)
- performance in live venues

**Licenses for synchronization** — When a recording is used as the soundtrack for a TV show, film, commercial, video game, presentation, or YouTube video, a fee is owed to the songwriter, the publisher, AND the copyright owner of the master recording. In industry-speak we say that a recording is “synced” with a moving image, thus the term sync licensing!

**Licenses for sampling** — Both copyright holders (the owner of the master recording and the owner of the composition) are owed money when another artist uses a sample from a one of your recorded songs.

**Print rights for sheet music** — As the songwriter/publisher, you are paid whenever your composition is duplicated in print form, including sheet music, lead sheets, fake books, etc.

## What is a Performing Rights Organization?

Performance royalties are paid by radio stations, venues, and TV networks to Performing Rights

Organizations (PROs) such as ASCAP, BMI, SESAC, or SOCAN, who then distribute the money to their affiliated songwriters and publishers.

Many songwriters affiliate themselves with PROs like ASCAP or BMI, but fail to register as a publisher as well. If you’re only registered as a songwriter, you can collect the 50% songwriter share of publishing royalties. But you’d be leaving the publisher’s share on the table. To collect ALL the money that’s owed to you, sign up with CD Baby Pro Publishing Administration (details below) — and we’ll collect the publisher’s share of your publishing royalties for you!

## Want help collecting the publishing money you are owed?

As you can see, there’s a lot to understand about music publishing. This guide merely skims the surface, but one thing should be clear: there’s serious money to be earned from your songs.

## CD Baby wants to make sure you’re getting paid everything you’re owed.

Sign up for CD Baby Pro Publishing Administration to make the most money from your music.

### How It Works

1. We’ll register you with a Performing Rights Organization, if you aren’t already.
2. We’ll register your songs worldwide (with Performance Rights Organizations, Mechanical Rights Organizations, YouTube and more).
3. We’ll collect royalties on your behalf and pay them directly to you!

Sign up at [CDBabyPublishing.com](https://www.cdbaby.com/publishing)

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