



Jason Benzon, born and raised in Taylorsville, Utah, has taken a musical journey that has turned the impossible to possible. As of recently, this "top of class" graduate from Berklee College of Music announces the grand opening of Song Track

Studios. Being accredited as a Record Producer, Arranger, Audio Engineer, Mix Engineer, and Songwriter, Jason believes he has found what it takes to turn Salt Lake City into the next LA or Nashville. I had to know more!

Through discussions over the past few months, you have mentioned that your musical journey began back when you were just seven years old. What are some early memories of getting started in recording and producing?

I have many memories, however, this one I'm going to share today goes into my journey. I started off writing short melodies in my head while swinging on our porch swing in my backyard when I was 7. I had no way of recording these melodies, but I would somehow always remember them. Snippets would constantly play throughout my mind.

When I was thirteen years old, I found my mom's guitar under her bed. It was old and laid there collecting dust. She didn't want anyone to touch it, but there was a curiosity. This curiosity brought me to play it and wipe away that dust. In about one hour, I came up with a song. Not too long after, I found my mom's old tape machine. I grabbed it, plugged in the microphone and realized that I can now finally record my songs.

At first, the tape machine was used to get my ideas down, but then I would swap back and forth until I had multiple guitar parts and harmonies recorded on

top of each other playing together. I was using the overdub process without even knowing what the overdub process was. This is when I subconsciously became not only a songwriter, but also a producer. I would create one song that way, and as that one song ended, I would leave space and create another song in the same way. This one tape had ten songs with various overdubbed parts and I would record these ten songs onto another tape to create multiple tapes I could give away and sell. Like I mentioned a little earlier, I felt a need to do the overdub process, before I even knew what it was; It felt like a necessity because I was only one person with lots of ideas for rhythms and harmonies.

Ever since I was born, we were also traveling all around the world. I was able to explore world music and began to feel like I was a part of something bigger. By the time I was twenty-one I had been to twenty-two different countries, and many of them

numerous times. I was able to explore music through more of the world's eyes and experiences. When I was about fourteen, whenever we traveled I started to bring the guitar even if it had to be wedged between the seats. I brought the tape recorder with me and manuscript paper with me as well, and was able to ask these artists in foreign countries how they do what they do and was able to still create while traveling. The curiosity began to arise more and I began asking myself, "How do the pros do it?"

I got to see how songwriting and producing was done all around the world. There was something magical about it all. However, as I began recording here in Utah at the age of fourteen, the magic wasn't there. There was something missing.

Would you say then, that you started off as both a producer and a songwriter?

At first, I just saw myself as a songwriter. I never thought of myself as a producer too just because

everything came together so easily during the songwriting process. It was seamless. A little later on, we ended up building a studio in a spare room and I was finally able to add everything together with digital tools. It hadn't hit me that I was doing both until then. For the longest time it seemed like being a songwriter and producer were just one thing. The upgraded studio in that spare room made it possible for me to eventually make around a thousand CDs across various albums with the digital equipment and I was able to sell them. I definitely didn't make thousands and thousands of dollars off of those CDs, but I was able to save every dollar that I collected.

As a thirteen year old boy, I had to know more. More about being a songwriter. More about being a producer. I knew I couldn't go further without education, so while in high school taking music theory classes, the local library was my go-to place. Books on songwriting, recording, producing, etc, I was

always pulling off of the shelf, which was stuff not being taught in high school. Every book the library had to offer on those topics, I read. I began to run out of things to read so I started listening to every CD I could get my hands on from the library. Peter Cincotti was one artist I discovered before many knew who he was. It was a neat experience to then watch his career expand later on. I would always try to get the homework done in high school as quickly as possible, just so I could work on anything pertaining to music. The library helped me discover myself.

Going back to your response to the first question, you mentioned that traveling sparked something magical. Something that you couldn't receive here in Utah. What happened to spark that magic?

This takes me back. There is one particular instance. It happened in Italy when I was twelve and it transformed my perspective; not just for

recording, but art in general. We were in a convenience store, at the cash register and a young girl was checking us out. Sitting by the register were a case of CDs. I pulled one out and the girl, who was around sixteen, ripped it out of my hands and put it back in the case. She said that I wouldn't understand it because it was in Italian. I understood that I didn't speak the language, but that is when I knew I wanted that CD even more. I grabbed it again, and asked "yeah, but is it any good?". She said, "Of course. It's Michele Zarrillo." I put it on the counter and said "well, then I want it!" This girl didn't know what to say and finally shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. In the case, it had two CDs in it. I listened to the two discs over and over the whole entire time we were in Italy for three weeks straight. Even though I didn't know what it was saying, I could feel the emotions. I felt a connection to the culture and people even though I didn't understand the language.

This is when I began to see that there is more to music than entertainment and recording. There is something about the human emotion or in other words that magic. "Why did that girl think I couldn't understand or appreciate the music?" This was the big spark. I saw that the magic within the music industry is about human expression, mankind and how we perceive life. When I came home, I was hoping to find a studio that would help me find that magic, but no studio provided that experience for me.

What were your next steps with searching for that human emotion?

After spending 2 years living in Mexico, I felt like the next step was going to California. I had the opportunity to go there for a couple days. I went to a music convention there that allowed me to talk to many artists, go to seminars and ask questions. I didn't know it, but a lot of Berklee professors were there as well. I felt like the magic I had been searching for after my trips around the

world, especially to Italy, was at this music convention. There was something about the way they talked about art and music. I had an opportunity to perform there and this experience was just another eye opener that the magic does exist and can be taught. That was kind of the next step. I came home, made a lot of connections and started to see that I was not only a songwriter, but a producer as well. I had an opportunity to intern at a studio here in Utah. This internship opportunity helped me see that there are two worlds when it comes to songwriting and production and it swayed me into wanting to go into production as well as wanting to build a studio. I wanted to provide a space where I could help artists better express themselves and get the most out of their vision. (After answering this question, Jason informed me that he first built a project studio while interning and then later on got to building the professional studio that we have now: SongTrackStudios.)

Changing the topic just a little bit. When did you realize that you wanted to go to Berklee College of Music and what led to that decision?

One of the Enhanced CDs I bought when I was 14 was John Mayer's. On the DVD side, it had his music videos on it as well as some interviews. I looked more into that DVD and saw that he, my hero, went to Berklee College of Music. I always viewed education as vital, and along with interning I saw that that was a crucial path for me. I went to or looked into every school here in Utah that was available. I was on the search for that magic. I wanted to build a studio and find that magic and be taught how. That is what led me to Berklee. I didn't know if I'd get accepted, but I applied, and the rest is history.

What was Berklee like?

What was it like being mentored by producers like Sean Slade, Stephen Webber, Mitch Benoff, Prince Charles and etc.?

They are masters of their craft. They are amazing. Seeing them in action and

working with the artists I love, was an honor. I would say overall, it was an amazing experience because I was holding onto their every word. "They got it!" "That is the look of a producer." Those were the thoughts that crossed my mind plenty of times. I was nervous as heck and felt like I didn't have the credentials needed to be there. Even though I felt like an underdog, they were encouraging. It was never, "You can't do this," Instead, it was "It is an art, it's vital. Yes, you will work your butt off, but this is vital." They teach you how to look at music through that perspective and even just studying painting helped me see how everything connects.

How has your production approach as a songwriter and producer back in the day, with the tape machine, shaped your approach now as a record producer with your Berklee degree?

With the tape machine, the more you added on top of what you already had, it would start to make some of the sound muffled. I even started to notice

after take six or seven, some of the melodies prerecorded began to get erased. I had to practice a ton and make sure I was in a comfortable environment just to get it right. With digital gear, there's a huge risk of getting bogged down with so many options and losing focus on the bigger picture. You really have to worry about Pre-Production even more nowadays with digital gear. "Less is more" is my approach, even more so now because of that experience. Part of that "less is more" comes with commitment and focus. Making decisions and knowing what is important to the listener. Berklee was a huge advocate of all that. They taught me what is most important to focus on and it was amazing to refine a process that I came to understand as Pre-Production. I had been delving into that all those years with the tape machine without actually knowing it.

As a record producer, what's your relationship to recording gear?

I do love recording gear, but I view it as a necessary

evil. In my eyes, it is more about the artist's vision and I find a way to adapt it to the artists. I make sure to use the gear in a way to carry the story and message the artists are trying to tell as well as use it to show who they are as an artist. I might be abusing the gear by tweaking things, but I am really trying to convey that message in the most impactful and powerful way that I can.

What are some of the philosophies that have led you to your success so far?

This is the most important question so far. One of my big philosophies is that I treat every artist as a success. It doesn't matter if they are on their first or last album. They are already a success to me. One of my favorite quotes that helped inspire this philosophy is by Victor Wooten. "You are already successful, the world just doesn't know it yet" (Wooten). A few of my other philosophies are that art is vital to humanity, artists are the eyes and ears of the

world and without art, humans would cease to exist. Creativity is a part of being human. It should be nourished through habit. As a producer I meditate every morning. I get out and create music no matter what. I have a set practice and daily rotation every day that helps nourish that creativity.

I have just a few more questions for you in regards to SongTrack Studios. SongTrack Studios has been in the works since 2014. What was your biggest inspiration for moving forward with this big project?

Besides finding the magic or helping the artist convey the message, I wanted to bring what Berklee had to offer to Utah. I could have moved to California or Nashville, but I love Utah, and there are so many talented artists here. I would then have to say a lot of inspiration came from my parents, from my faith and finally and most importantly, my artists. They have a story and a message to share and I want to give them that voice here in Utah.

The studio is finally up and running 10 years later, what was one of the biggest challenges you faced while building the studio?

The complexity itself. Rising to that professional state by myself was a challenge. We consulted with Berklee professors and many others, but we mainly did this by ourselves. I also did it while going to school. To sum it all up, the biggest challenge was making goals that seemed impossible, possible.

What did you do to overcome/handle this challenge?

Whenever you are creating something like an album, a painting, a masterpiece, etc., that creation explains who you are. It is a piece of yourself. You have to believe in yourself. You will have many outside forces saying that you can't or that it won't turn out the way you want it to. My way of overcoming that is believing in myself as well as my muse. As an artist you have to have tough skin when those outside

forces are coming down on you.

What did you learn from all of this?

On top of learning to not give into those outside forces, I learned the importance of collaboration, the importance of education, of passion and of vision. There was a lot I learned actually. It is hard to sum up just one thing, but it was a faith builder, identity builder and I learned a lot about myself. When you are pitted up against the impossible, it is almost impossible to not learn about yourself. I learned not only what I was capable of but also what the studio is capable of.

Who has been your biggest support during all of this? How have they helped you turn this dream into a reality?

Definitely my parents. During the times I stopped believing in myself, they kept believing in me. They were by far the most influential. They helped fund me as well as supported me. I owe so much to them.

**You are an artist yourself,
what can you offer to
other artists that you
wished other studios
could have offered you?**

Honestly Pre-Production and an objective ear. It is hard as an artist to be objective. It is like being an author writing a book and not having an editor. You need someone who can provide an outside perspective and use a process along with the tools in which helps communicate their message and story as powerfully as possible. Someone who can emphasize their lyrics in the right way and someone who can tell the story in the way that it is most effective. Every artist is facing a new part of themselves with each new project, so objectivity is crucial.

**What are your hopes and
dreams now that
Song Track Studios is up
and running?**

My hopes and dreams are about bringing the record production process that I believe in and that I was taught at Berklee here to Utah. I want Utah artists

to collaborate more. I want them to find a process more easily; a process that I struggled to find myself. I want to create a strong and thriving community where artists are able to convey themselves and create music that stands the test of time; music that comes out of Utah that continually impresses industry standards. I hope to turn Salt Lake City into the next LA, New York, or Nashville, etc.

**I have one more question
for you. Imagine future
artists who will work with
you who are currently
reading this, what would
you want them to
know/tell them?**

What I want them to know and not just my artists, but all artists, including ones I hope to one day work with and artists I may never have the opportunity to work with, is that I appreciate them and that I love what they do. As an artist, they put their hearts out on the line and share their story. They stand out on the line and say, "This is who I am". I want them to know that I appreciate them and

that they are the bravest souls out there. I would also like to say to new artists, just focus on being you. Don't worry about originality, you are unique already. If you understand yourself you will find that you are already original. Focus on what makes you you. This all goes back to that quote by Victor Wooten, "You are already successful, the world just doesn't know it yet." Let's get to the heart of the story of what makes you you and who you are as an artist and a person. It is an honor to get to work with artists and it's my passion and joy to make sure I can grasp their vision and help shape their story as powerfully as possible.