An interview with producer Bill Jolly:

Q: What does a music producer actually do?

BJ: Well, I'm really a producer/arranger/engineer/vocal coach and psychologist. (Laughs) People come to me with their songs and ideas and I help to complete their vision. They may only have a melody and a few words but I can actually hear their songs as a finished project in my head. I'll play all the instruments, coach the singers or players on what notes to perform, edit or tune up any bad notes and mix and master the final project. A good producer is your musical coach. He creates a vibe, understands you, your music and your audience and brings out the best in your performance and the recording.

Q: How important is technology in what you do?

BJ: You have to embrace technology to survive today, but I believe it shouldn't be a complete replacement for musicianship and feel. When I started out, we all entered the studio and played the record down at the same time using real instruments and playing off each other. While that seldom happens these days, I approach technology from a very "live" and musical place today. A good producer will understand the "live thing" and the "computer thing" equally and when it's advantageous to use one or the other.

Bill Jolly's recording studio is an impressive collection of computers, instruments and the latest sounds and technology. This is where he creates the magic.

Q: What are some of the most difficult tasks you've had to encounter musically?

BJ: Wow. Well, I got called to orchestrate and record (17) songs over night once for a play where the band quit the night before. I once had to replay all the parts and create (5) albums worth of cover remakes with a (3) day deadline to complete it all. I recently had to write (26) original songs in a week. I had to create (50) full orchestral arrangements for a major Television special with only a (2) week window to complete it all in. With that kind of stuff you have be an expert at losing sleep. (Laughs.) I've taken vocal records with incorrect harmonies and reconstructed all the vocals to the correctly sung pitches. I've had to replay and re-sing missing parts, synced recorded parts to a live band and vice-versa. I've restored old vinyl recordings to sound like new. I've also written last second charts that had to be emailed to an awaiting orchestra in another country that was about to go on stage. Really, there's very little that I haven't seen or encountered at some point in time.

Q: How important was working with the "big named" artists to your development as a producer?

BJ: You know, I'm just a regular guy. It's been a blessing to have worked with as many big names as I have. But really, I just enjoy working with anybody who's talented and is passionate about their music. The big names give you the credibility and the experience. You definitely have to be on your "A" game with them but I really just love to work with cool and talented people, period.

Q: You work with people from all across the globe. How exactly do you do that?

BJ: The internet is a wonderful thing. I can literally collaborate with anybody, anywhere. People send me Mp3's over the web and we collaborate through video chat too. I've even worked on songs that were conceived completely over the internet or the telephone. Singers can record their vocals at a local studio in their area and forward the files or they can come to my studio to record from scratch. Really, there's so many ways to get it done these days. Actually, now I've even been recording vocals through Skype. So, in many ways, I'm able to do recording sessions all around the world. Also, I offer a remote recording package, where I bring the studio to you. I fly into their town and produce and record their projects in their own back yard. It's a little more expensive but it is very popular for very busy people who just can't get away.

Q: You also do instrumental tracks I see. Has there ever been a song that you couldn't reproduce?

BJ: No. Knock on wood. Believe it or not, I really pride myself in being musically diverse. I also do work for a company that hires me to do sound-a-like remakes that they license in foreign markets. I could literally be doing a Snoop Dog cover, a Hanukah recording, a Beatles cover, a top 40 dance track and a Broadway soundtrack in the same week. So far, there hasn't been a song that I couldn't faithfully reproduce note for note.

Q: Connected people like yourself are usually "stand offish" and difficult to reach out to for the average music person. What makes you so open to working with anyone?

BJ: When I was starting out, the majority of the “connected people” wouldn’t give me the time of day. Most wouldn’t listen to my ideas, wouldn’t give me any advice or return my calls. I vowed that if I ever got to that level that I would never be that way. We all have dreams. Many of the people I work with have regular 9 to 5 jobs and families and just want to be able to connect with somebody reputable who can help them to live out their passions for music. That’s what I do.

Q: Can people actually afford you? How much do your services cost?

BJ: (Laughs.) I knew that question was coming. Many producers have a basic cost per song. But, I believe that no two songs are created equally. “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” done with a toy piano does not take the same amount of time, effort and budget to complete as a fully orchestrated version of a Beethoven Symphony done with a live orchestra and choir. Costs should be determined on a case by case basis and determined after the music or idea is heard, a basic instrumentation is discussed and a timeframe is determined. I sometimes do “package rates” for the production and recording of an entire CD. However, my in-studio hourly rate (which includes all of my producing, playing and engineering services) is sometimes better for those who are trying to budget their money and time wisely.

Q: What is the most important thing for a singer to consider when choosing a producer?

BJ: Good question. I think it’s important to work with a producer who really understands how singers physically sing. He has to be sensitive to the delicate balance between feel, pitch and emotion. Producers who’ve worked with great singers (and can sing a little too) will generally communicate “vocally” a little better than say, a producer whose expertise may really be in creating tracks. It also helps if the producer has taken some voice lessons in the past because he really has to be able to guide you with vocal advice during the session. Lastly, he must communicate well, be patient but still be able to push you (the right way) to get the best of your vocals onto tape.

Q: What do you think separates you from other music producers?

BJ: I really admire a lot of other producer’s work but I honestly don’t spend a lot of time comparing myself because everybody’s unique. But, to answer your question, I think my strong point is my diversity and my ability to understand people. Great vibes make comfortable performers and that creates an atmosphere for making great records. Many producers also specialize in 1 or 2 types of music. I really love diversity and can understand where just about anybody’s coming from. I think that my ability to be a “one stop shop” is helpful too. All you have to bring is your idea and your talent and you can end up with a finished product. Finally, I believe that my reputation and credibility in the music business creates comfort, security and trust for my clients.

Q: How does someone get started with you?

BJ: Simple. Call or email me. Let me know what you’d like to do. Let’s figure out your vision, figure out a timeline, a budget and set a plan of attack to get going. It’s that easy.

Q: What advice would you have for people who really desire to live out their passion for music?

BJ: Don't give up. Everyone can dream. Don't worry about age, style or other's opinions. Just do it! We all have a right to be happy in life. If you have a passion for music, fulfill it. Loving music doesn't mean that you necessarily want to quit your job and go on the road. You may just want the experience of living out your dream and one wish in life. You will only have regrets for what you never tried or attempted to do in life. People save up their entire lives to get the chance to travel to their one dream destination. What's wrong with saving up to fulfill your one passion for music? Dream it. Connect with someone reputable and live it. I can help you.