

Music Revenue Streams Guide

Greyscale Music Group — Artist Management Toolkit · Money Kit

A complete map of how money flows to a modern recording + performing artist. For each stream you'll see **what it is**, **who pays it**, **who collects it** / **where it's registered**, and **realistic ranges** so you can sanity-check what's landing in the account.

The single most important idea: **most artists have two separate businesses living inside one career — the RECORDING (the master) and the SONG (the composition/publishing)**. They pay out on different pipes, to different collectors, on different timelines. If you only think about Spotify, you are leaving real money on the table.

Quick mental model

THE MASTER (recording)	THE SONG (composition)
"the actual audio"	"the lyrics + melody"
Owned by: artist/label	Owned by: songwriter(s) + publisher
Collected via:	Collected via:
• Distributor/label	• PRO (ASCAP/BMI/SESAC)
• SoundExchange	• MLC (mechanicals)
• Sync license (master)	• Publishing admin
	• Sync license (sync)

Two copyrights, two revenue engines. Every stream below belongs to one or both.

1. Recorded music (the master)

1a. Streaming (the big one)

What: On-demand audio/video streams on Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube Music, TIDAL, Deezer, etc.

Who pays: The platform (DSP) pays the **rights-holder of the master** — for an independent artist that's the **distributor** (DistroKid, TuneCore, CD Baby, Symphonic, UnitedMasters, Amuse, etc.), who passes it to you minus their cut/fee.

Who collects / where registered: Your distributor delivers the tracks and collects master royalties. **Separately**, the *songwriter's* share of streaming (mechanical + performance) flows through the MLC and your PRO — see the Royalties guide. A streaming play generates money on **both** the master pipe and the song pipe.

Realistic ranges (per-stream, master side, USD): - Spotify: ~\$0.003–\$0.005 - Apple Music: ~\$0.007–\$0.01 - Amazon: ~\$0.004 - YouTube (Content ID / Music): ~\$0.0008–\$0.003 - TIDAL: ~\$0.01+ (low volume) - **Rule of thumb:** ~\$3–\$5 per 1,000 streams to the master owner, blended across platforms. A track at 100k streams/month ≈ \$300–\$500/mo to the master before splits.

Spotify monetization threshold (2024+): tracks need ~1,000 streams in the prior 12 months to start earning recording royalties. Plan releases so catalog tracks cross that line.

1b. Downloads (still real, mostly niche)

What: Paid à-la-carte downloads — iTunes/Apple, Amazon MP3, and crucially **Beatport / Bandcamp** for electronic/house artists.

Who pays: The store, via your distributor (iTunes/Amazon) or directly (Bandcamp pays you; Beatport pays through your distributor or label).

Who collects: Distributor for the mass stores; **Bandcamp pays the artist directly** (you keep ~80–85% after their fee + payment processing). Beatport is the lane that matters for house/tech-house — DJs still buy WAVs there.

Ranges: A \$1.29 single download nets ~\$0.70–\$0.90 to the master owner after store cut. Bandcamp: artist sets the price and keeps the large majority. Beatport track ~\$1.49–\$2.49; you net roughly 30–70% depending on label/distributor terms.

1c. Physical (vinyl, CD, cassette)

What: Vinyl is a real revenue + brand item again, especially for dance music and superfans. CDs/cassettes are merch-table items.

Who pays: The buyer — sold via Bandcamp, your own store (Shopify), the merch table, or a distributor for retail.

Who collects: You (D2C) or your distributor/label (retail). **Note:** if you press physical that contains songs you didn't 100% write, you owe **mechanical royalties** on every unit pressed — see Royalties guide (statutory mechanical rate, ~12¢/song for a 5-min-or-under track as of the current rate period). Budget that into COGS.

Ranges: Vinyl 12" retails \$25–\$40; after pressing (~\$8–\$14/unit at small runs), sleeves, and fees you net \$8–\$20/unit D2C. Margins improve sharply at higher volume.

2. Publishing (the song)

This is the most-neglected money. Every time the *composition* is used, it generates publishing income, split into three buckets:

2a. Mechanical royalties

What: Owed whenever a **copy** of the song is made — physical pressings, downloads, and **interactive streams** (yes, streaming generates a mechanical too).

Who pays: Streaming services and anyone reproducing the song.

Who collects: - **US streaming/download mechanicals** → **The MLC (Mechanical Licensing Collective)**, mlc.co. You must register as a songwriter/publisher to claim these. Unmatched mechanicals pile up if you don't. - **Physical/download mechanicals** are often handled via Harry Fox / direct or by your distributor's publishing add-on.

Ranges: Small per-unit, but adds up. The streaming mechanical is a fraction of a cent per stream on top of the master payout. **If you self-release and never registered with the MLC, this money is sitting unclaimed.**

2b. Performance royalties (public performance)

What: Owed when the song is **publicly performed** — radio, TV, streaming, live venues, bars, clubs, gyms, restaurants, retail.

Who pays: Broadcasters, venues, DSPs (the songwriter's performance share), businesses with music licenses.

Who collects: Your **PRO — ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC** (you pick one). They split it into the **writer's share** (paid to you, the writer) and the **publisher's share** (paid to your publishing entity — register one even if it's just you, or you forfeit ~50%).

Ranges: Highly variable. Terrestrial radio spins and TV placements pay well; a club DJ set playing your track pays little per play but PROs do sample/log venues. The publisher's share is real money most self-managed artists never collect.

2c. Sync (composition side)

Covered in section 6 — sync touches both the master and the song.

3. Live performance

Usually the **largest single income line** for a working artist, especially in electronic music.

3a. Guarantees (the booking fee)

What: The flat fee a promoter/venue/festival pays to book the artist, negotiated in the offer/advance.

Who pays: Promoter or talent buyer.

Who collects: The artist/management, usually via a **deposit (often 50% on signing) + balance on the night** (cash or wire), handled through the booking agent if there is one (agent takes ~10%).

Ranges (electronic / club lane, USD, wildly market-dependent): - Emerging/local: \$200–\$1,500 - Regional buzz / strong socials: \$1,500–\$7,500 - Established touring act: \$7,500–\$25,000+ - Headline festival / brand name: \$25,000–\$100,000+

3b. Door deals & backend

What: A percentage of ticket revenue, often structured as “**\$X guarantee vs. Y% of net box office, whichever is greater,**” or a straight door split for smaller shows.

Who pays: Promoter, settled at end of night against the **settlement sheet** (capacity, ticket counts, comps, expenses).

Who collects: Artist/management at settlement. **Always settle in person or get the manifest** — count the house.

Ranges: Backend points typically kick in after the promoter recoups costs; deals of “guarantee vs. 85–90% of net after costs” exist for bigger acts.

3c. VIP, meet-and-greets, table/bottle splits

What: Premium tickets, M&G packages, and (in club world) a cut of VIP table/bottle minimums tied to your night.

Who pays: Fans (VIP/M&G) or the venue (table splits).

Who collects: Management negotiates these into the deal; VIP/M&G often run through the ticketing platform or a dedicated upsell partner (Laylo, ticketing add-ons).

Ranges: M&G \$25–\$150/fan; VIP packages add 20–50% over GA price; table splits are deal-specific.

4. Merch

What: Apparel, accessories, vinyl/physical, and limited drops. Two channels: **on-the-road (merch table)** and **online (D2C store / fulfillment partner)**.

Who pays: Fans.

Who collects: You — but watch two deductions: - **Venue merch cut:** Many venues take **10–25% of gross merch sold at the show** (sometimes higher in major markets, sometimes 0% if you negotiate or it's a DIY room). Negotiate this in the advance. - **Online fulfillment:** Print-on-demand / fulfillment partners take a per-unit or percentage cut.

Ranges: Tee COGS \$8–\$15, retail \$30–\$40 → \$15–\$25 gross margin/unit before the venue cut. A healthy show can do **\$2–\$5 of merch per head** (“per-head” is the key touring metric). Online margins are higher but volume is lower without a tour pushing it.

5. Brand partnerships & sponsorship

What: Paid content, ambassadorships, gear/label endorsements, event title sponsors (very relevant to TechYes events), and sponsored social posts.

Who pays: Brands directly, or via an agency/influencer platform.

Who collects: Artist/management against a **deliverables-based invoice** (e.g., “2 Reels + 3 stories + 1 event mention”). Get a short brand-deal agreement: usage rights, exclusivity window, territory, deadline, payment terms (Net 15/30).

Ranges: Heavily follower- and engagement-dependent. Rough creator benchmarks: ~\$100–\$500 per 10k engaged followers per sponsored post; ambassadorships and event sponsorships are negotiated as packages (\$1k–\$50k+). For TechYes-style events, sponsorship is sold as tiers (bar sponsor, stage sponsor, title sponsor).

6. Sync licensing

What: Placing music in **film, TV, ads, video games, trailers, social/branded content, and other artists’ content**. Often the highest-value single check an indie artist can land.

Who pays: The production/brand/agency (the “sync”). A sync requires **two licenses**: - **Master use license** → paid to the master owner (artist/label/distributor). - **Sync license** → paid to the song owner (songwriter/publisher).

Who collects: Whoever controls each right. If you own both, you get **both checks**. Deals are sourced via **sync agents, music libraries, supervisors, or distributor sync programs** (they take 20–50%). Performance royalties from the placement airing later flow through your **PRO** on top of the upfront fee.

Ranges (upfront, one feature, very broad): - Indie film / student / small podcast: \$0–\$1,000 - Streaming TV background cue: \$1,000–\$10,000 - National ad campaign: \$15,000–\$150,000+ - Trailer / AAA game / major brand: \$25,000–\$500,000+ - Plus **backend performance royalties** when it airs (TV especially).

7. Neighboring rights / digital performance (SoundExchange)

What: A **master-side** performance royalty paid when the **sound recording** is played on **non-interactive digital radio** — SiriusXM, Pandora (non-interactive tier), webcasters, and internet radio. This is distinct from your PRO (which pays the *song*). Many artists miss this entirely.

Who pays: The statutory licensee (SiriusXM, Pandora, etc.).

Who collects: **SoundExchange (soundexchange.com)**. You register as the **featured artist** and as the **rights owner (label/master owner)**. SoundExchange splits the royalty: **45% featured artist, 5% non-featured musicians (via the AFM/SAG-AFTRA fund), 50% rights owner**. Register both hats to collect all of it.

International neighboring rights: Outside the US, neighboring-rights societies pay performers and master owners for broadcast/public performance of recordings. A **neighboring rights administrator** can register and collect these foreign royalties for you (they take a commission). US artists with overseas radio/TV play should look into this.

Ranges: Scales with radio/satellite play. Even modest SiriusXM or Pandora rotation produces quarterly checks; for radio-friendly records this is meaningful recurring income.

8. Creator-platform & direct-fan income

What: Money earned on platforms where the artist *is* the creator: - **YouTube** (ad revenue via AdSense + Content ID claims on your music) - **TikTok / Instagram** creator funds, bonuses, gifts/Live - **Twitch** (subs, bits, ads) — big for producers who stream studio sessions/DJ sets - **Patreon / Bandcamp subscriptions / Ko-fi** — recurring superfan support - **Laylo** — drops, presale capture, and fan monetization (core to the Greyscale/TechYes/Snooko playbook) - **Sample packs / presets / Splice** — producers selling sounds

Who pays: The platform and/or fans directly.

Who collects: The artist's accounts. **Two gotchas:** 1. Your music on **YouTube** earns **both** creator ad revenue *and* the underlying master/publishing royalties — make sure Content ID (via your distributor) is on so you collect on others' uploads too. 2. DJ/live sets streamed on Twitch/YouTube can trigger takedowns if they contain others' masters — use your own/cleared music or accept Content ID claims routing money to rights-holders.

Ranges: YouTube ad RPM ~\$1–\$5 per 1,000 monetized views (genre/geo-dependent). Patreon/subscriptions are the steadiest: 100 fans at \$5/mo = \$500/mo recurring, minus platform fee. Splice/sample income compounds for active producers.

Putting it together — the collection checklist

To make sure **every** stream above is actually reaching the account, the artist must be registered in every relevant place. Recording streams flow through the **distributor**; song streams flow through your **PRO + the MLC**; digital radio flows through **SoundExchange**; sync flows through **direct deals/agents**; live and merch are **collected at the source**.

See the companion document — [Royalties & Registration Guide.md](#) — for the step-by-step “register everywhere” checklist so no money is left uncollected.

One-page summary table

Stream	Right (Master / Song)	Who pays	Collected via
Streaming (master share)	Master	DSPs	Distributor / label
Streaming (mechanical)	Song	DSPs	The MLC
Streaming (performance)	Song	DSPs	PRO (ASCAP/BMI/SESAC)
Downloads	Master	Stores	Distributor / Bandcamp
Physical (vinyl/CD)	Master (+ mechanical owed)	Fans / retail	D2C / distributor
Mechanicals (physical/dl)	Song	Reproducer	MLC / HFA / distributor pub
Performance (radio/TV/venue)	Song	Broadcasters/venues	PRO
Live guarantee	—	Promoter	Artist / agent
Door / backend	—	Promoter	Settlement
VIP / M&G	—	Fans	Ticketing / management
Merch (live)	—	Fans	Merch table (– venue cut)
Merch (online)	—	Fans	D2C / fulfillment
Brand / sponsorship	—	Brands	Invoice (deliverables)
Sync — master use	Master	Production/brand	Direct / sync agent / distributor
Sync — sync license	Song	Production/brand	Direct / publisher / sync agent
Digital radio (SiriusXM/Pandora)	Master	Statutory licensees	SoundExchange
Neighboring rights (intl)	Master	Foreign societies	Neighboring-rights admin

Stream	Right (Master / Song)	Who pays	Collected via
YouTube ad + Content ID	Both	YouTube	AdSense + distributor CID
Creator platforms (Twitch/Patreon/Laylo)	—	Platform / fans	Artist accounts

Ranges in this guide are realistic working estimates for a US independent artist and will vary by deal, market, genre, and time. Use them to sanity-check statements, not as guarantees.