

Basic Concepts About Promoting Folk Music Recordings to Radio

By Art Menius

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. As a DJ long before I became a radio promoter, I have seen seemingly every kind of mistake people make in servicing radio. As a promoter, I have gained insights into what even the most gifted artists, record companies, engineers, and producers don't know about promoting to radio. Most gaffes come from self-released and promoted projects, but even established labels and promoters don't always get it right.

In this document, I attempt to distill what I have learned both sending and receiving CDs and files over the years. This is a guide to not shooting yourself in the foot or wasting time and money.

Terminology

Album: A collection of seven or more tracks regardless of release format

Assets or Media Assets: In short, the digital version of everything you would get with the physical product, including those only sent to media: all album artwork as hi-res image files, PDFs of liner notes, lyrics, and brochure, bios, one sheets, track cards (or sheets).

CD: Compact disc. A form of physical media that can include one to roughly two dozen songs.

CD-R: A limited run, limited packaging CD produced primarily for servicing radio as an advance, single, or for a project with no commercial CD version.

College Radio: Since these stations receive institutional support, they offer the most experimental and diverse locally produced radio at any power from internet only to 25KW. While some have stable professional management or long-established adult hosts, maintaining steady relationships or even current information proves a formidable challenge with student run stations.

Community Radio: The broadest form of non-commercial (NCE), community radio can resemble college in the breadth of its radio produced by local hosts or public radio with syndicated programming from Public Radio Exchange and Pacifica Audiopoint (Pacifica's "Democracy Now" is the bedrock of many community stations' fundraising). Community radio ranges from powerhouse stations like KBCS in Seattle that resemble NPR stations in staffing and budget to 5KW full power community stations with the minimum 5 full-time employees required for CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) funding to low power stations limited to 100 watts. The latter can range from fifty or more unpaid hosts, even a paid employee, to just one-person operating an automated station.

EP: A recording project consisting usually of three to six tracks regardless of format.

Gracenote: Apple's database for identifying music on a compact disc. If you have an old car with a CD player, Gracenote provides the information about artist, song, and album on your audio display.

Internet Radio: Consists of both the streams from terrestrial stations (those that broadcast over the airwaves) and of internet-only stations. Those span the gamut from commercial operations that mimic satellite radio with multiple channels and genre, to those that operate one stream just as if it were a conventional station, to one-person, one-show-a-week outlets that may be part of an aggregator.

Metadata: For properly encoded music files, the metadata provides the essential information identifying it: Artist, Track #, Title, Album, Album Artist, Recording Label, IRSC, even Songwriting & Publishing, if you want to. The first five fields are the essential ones.

One-Sheets: Originally conceived to convince wholesalers and retailers to order LPs, One-sheets now mostly provide background information to programmers to decide whether to give the recording a chance. They also help DJs to sound knowledgeable and to select songs. They include release and add dates, basic information and credits, back story about the album, and some bio information. If you use a track sheet, for convenience, rather than a track card, it would appear on the reverse of the one-sheet.

Public Radio: Not synonymous with non-commercial or listener supported radio, “Public radio” refers to the largest and best funded non-commercial radio stations which are affiliates of National Public Radio (NPR) and American Public Media. Before public radio standardization began 30 years ago, these were bulwark stations for presenting folk music to large, affluent audiences. While several vital locally produced shows remain on public radio, folk programming there has become dominated by a handful of nationally and regionally distributed programs such as “Midnight Special,” “American Routes,” “The View From Here,” “Blues Caravan,” and “Folk Alley.”

Publicist: Someone whose business is promoting artists to mainstream media including reviews, articles in print and web outlets, and TV appearances. A different (and more expensive) specialty and set of relationships than radio promotion, although they should sync their efforts. Since they work with publications, the publicist’s work starts several weeks earlier than radio.

Radio Add Date: This is when you want radio to start playing your new music. Radio should have the downloads and CDs before this date. Sometimes this is the same as the release date. More often the two dates are conflated or confused. Ideally it is two to three weeks earlier.

Radio Promoter: Someone in the business of pushing recordings to radio programmers. Skills include maintaining relationships and communication with hundreds of hosts; keeping data about radio stations as up to date as possible; making music available to radio by streaming and download; preparing assets; selecting to whom to send CDs; and tracking airplay and thanking hosts. Radio promoters usually have resources and relationships beyond those of an individual artist.

Release Date: The release date, always a Friday, is a holdover from the days of actual retail store music sales, when it happened on Tuesday. It was the day the LPs went on the shelves for sale. Nowadays, it is supposed to be the day the album goes on sale on CD Baby (or the like) and by extension on Amazon, while streaming goes live and, one hopes, a video drops.

Satellite Radio: Is for all intents and purposes, SiriusXM. Because of the national reach of its folk and bluegrass programming, they carry a great impact on weighted charts.

Single: The release of an individual song by video, streaming, download, CD, or a mixture of those media.

Track Card or Sheet: Documents formatted as the names suggest, with track number, time, tempo or style, FCC compliance information, and one or two sentences about each selection

Weighted charts: Grant greater impact to the outlets with the greatest reach - satellite and syndicated programming and the least to low power and Internet stations. The Folk Chart is not weighted, meaning that each play counts the same whether 100 watts locally or on 100 public stations.

Timeline

Nothing defeats your purpose worse than starting too late in the radio promotion process (it is even worse for publicity to reviewers and feature writers). Use the handy rule of thumb: if you are almost ready for the CDs to be manufactured, you have waited far too long. The most compressed reasonable timeline starts five weeks before the radio add date, usually a couple of weeks before the retail or public release date.

Thus, moving at the fastest speed advisable, promotional work would start no later than seven weeks before you want the recording available on Amazon, Spotify, CD Baby, and the like. That computes to five weeks before the latest preferable radio add date. You would want to have the radio promoter on board at worst a month before that.

Practical example: You want your project on sale and streaming on Friday, July 10th. That means a radio add date no later than Friday, June 26th with radio promotion work starting at least by May 22. Mid-April would be the drop dead for contracting with a promoter or making your plan for doing it yourself.

In summary: even with an optimistic timeline, radio promotion must be initiated at least three months prior to release. Publicity work should start a couple of months even before that.

Compressed Release Timeline for Radio Add

5 weeks before

- Media private streaming available for pitches
- Video on YouTube unlisted and being pitched for premier
- Quotes for video pitch and track sheet or card ready
- All content for assets - text and image - ready

4 weeks before: Radio Add Date

- CD distribution list complete

3 weeks before Radio Add Date

- CDs back from manufacturer
- Premier scheduled
- One-sheets and Track sheets or cards printed
- All assets completed included in finished media download site
- Album available for download and streaming by DJs
- Set up telephone interviews near release date

1 week before

- Album available for download by DJs
- Album available on AirPlay Direct (APD)
- Promo CD mailing completed
- Album in enews to 670 programmers

3 to 7 days before

- Video or album premier on popular website – heavy social media push. Made public from unlisted the night before
- CD Baby for album ready
- APD release by sending DPK to 600 hosts
- Special email to download friendly programmers

Radio Add Date (aka radio release date)

- Streaming goes public– heavy social media push
- Featured in enews for DJs

Next Week

- Video for second single, if desired, ready and pitched for premier
- Tracking and thanking for airplay begins
- Offering station IDs (aka liners) to program

Four weeks after

- Second video/single dropped, if desired

Six weeks after

- Active tracking and promotion winds down

The video is essential and should be prioritized accordingly

The video has the most reach of any part of the project. It can even increase radio play. The potential for people seeing the video is vastly greater than hearing just the audio. The video will get more views than CDs and downloads combined get listens. Consider that YouTube is the most important place for music discovery more than radio by long shot and more than even Spotify, Pandora, or Soundcloud. That is how the video should be prioritized especially for time, effort, and creativity. In addition, the video premier gets you coverage on a major website that reaches far beyond your own resources.

The better the video the bigger the outlet. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive, just a creative piece of art that complements or augments the music version. The internet is stuffed with videos of full band performing. The more it is just a video of a band playing, the less its marketability to outlets that reach new fans. It can even be as little as a creative approach to presenting the musicians playing, however. Bruce Molsky and David Holt made an amazing one by using drone shots of them playing high up on a mountain.

Use the natural and manmade assets of your location. You can find interesting locations wherever you live. Your local theatre community contains skilled actors, often at the same career level as you. Somebody you know has a drone that can carry a camera.

Once you have the video completed and on YouTube - unlisted until going public for the debut - your team begins pitching it to the major roots music websites that still do video premiers. Create a priority list and work down it until you reach the best outlet that will debut your video. That is easy to say, but much easier for professionals with established relationships to do.

Examples of simple, creative, relatively inexpensive videos:

<https://americanahighways.org/2020/01/10/video-premiere-annette-wasiliks-the-world-is-on-fire/> which is the band playing but in an unusual location with creative camera work

<https://americanahighways.org/2019/11/21/video-premiere-frank-allie-lees-lost-john/> again the duo playing but with elements of the song happening behind and around them

<https://youtu.be/czMNCRouEBM> mixes a little new footage, stills, and "found footage".

How to Get More Plays by Making Things Easy for Programmers

First, you need airplay more than DJ's need more music to play. The supply far exceeds the demand. That means radio programmers' needs come first. A successful artist or promoter keeps this in mind.

Second, here is the reality. DJs receive a steady stream of CDs and downloads, 8 to 12 during a light week; a couple of dozen in a heavy week. One time I had more than 100 waiting for me in bins at the post office.

Third, lots of those submissions are a waste of money because they don't fit the show. That factor is another thing radio promoters track across multiple projects and years. Of the CDs I receive as a DJ, only 25% clearly have at least one song for my show; 50% clearly don't fit just on content such as a love song for my political song show; and 25% are maybes usually due to lack of lyrics or track descriptions. That means I have to take extra time to screen them, which usually means they never get played. Think before you send.

Whoever makes it easiest for a host to program them, especially if the artist isn't a big name, the more likely they will give it a chance. Removing barriers seems obvious, but you wouldn't believe the troubles I've seen. Even large labels fumble some of these mostly common sense matters.

Here is how to do it:

Send CDs to those who prefer them and digital downloads to those happy to use them.

- 1) Get your music to the DJs in multiple ways
 - a. Airplay Direct (APD) has many downsides, but it is where DJs discover new music. Use its DPK feature for an additional direct email push
 - b. Join FOLKDJ listserve (folkradio.org) and post your notice and links there
 - c. Same for the FolkDJ Facebook group, except for download links
 - d. Direct email to hosts
 - e. Having a stream on Soundcloud, Spotify, or the like is essential. Soundcloud streams can be kept private for media.
 - f. And, of course, mailing CDs
 - i. Expensive - with cost of CDs at even the lowest printing and postage rates you are looking at close to \$4 for each you send to media.
 - ii. Lists of radio require weekly updates from multiple sources
 - iii. Most lists one can buy are woefully out of date. Only professional promoters have current lists. You have to build your own list of radio programmers from posts on FolkDJ, Googling, downloads from APD, lists of chart reporters.

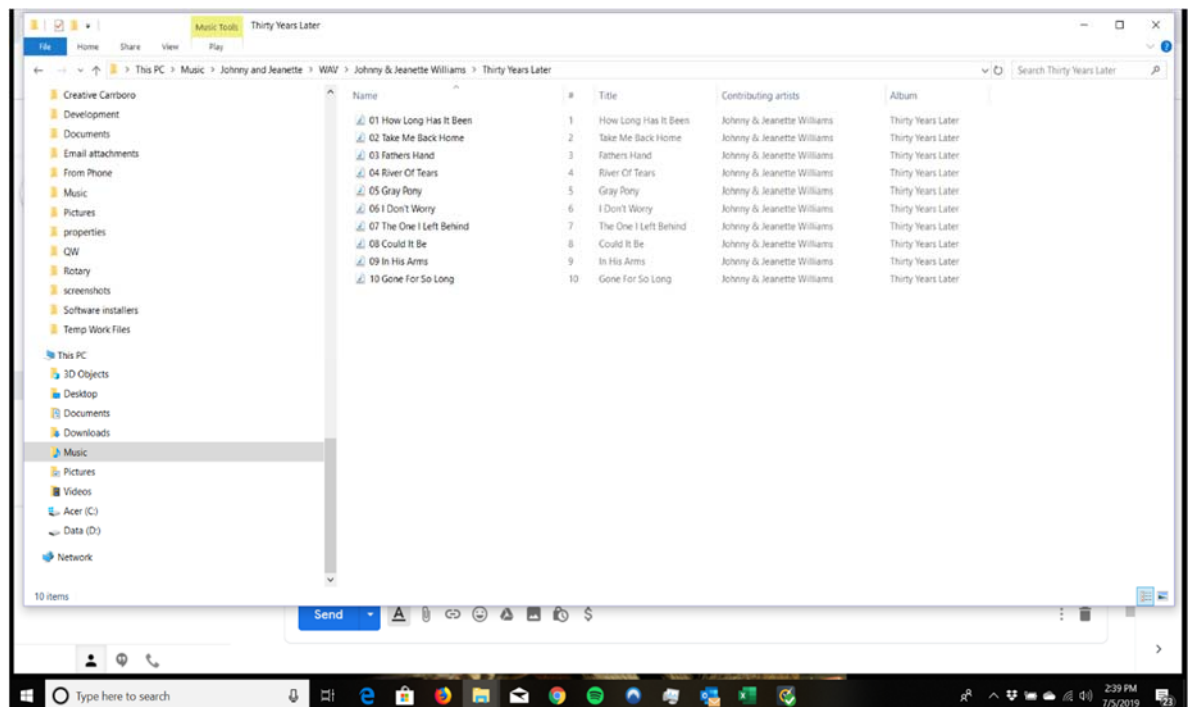
For CDs:

- a. Always remove shrink wrap from DJ copies of CDs.
- b. Don't make the package difficult to open. Professional mailers may waste a lot of plastic and paper, but they use a third of the packaging tape that civilians do.
- c. CD must be entered into Gracenote via iTunes. Free and easy, but essential. Why?
 - i. Do you want a screen on a CD player or a dashboard display for radio or CD to read "Unknown Artist"?
 - ii. Some DJs will not play music that isn't in Gracenote since it can't be logged automatically
- d. The CD packaging itself needs to be DJ-friendly
 - i. Always have a spine with the name of the artist and release. Remember, DJs may be looking for your CD among thousands.
 - ii. Track listing on the CD must include ordinal number of track, name of track, and duration. DJs need that. Imagine someone needing a 3:25 long song in 60 seconds.
 - iii. CDs must be easy to shelve. Unusual packages may gain initial attention, but then get lost.
 - iv. Make the text on the CD package easy to read, especially against colored backgrounds. Designers sometimes forget that practical function.

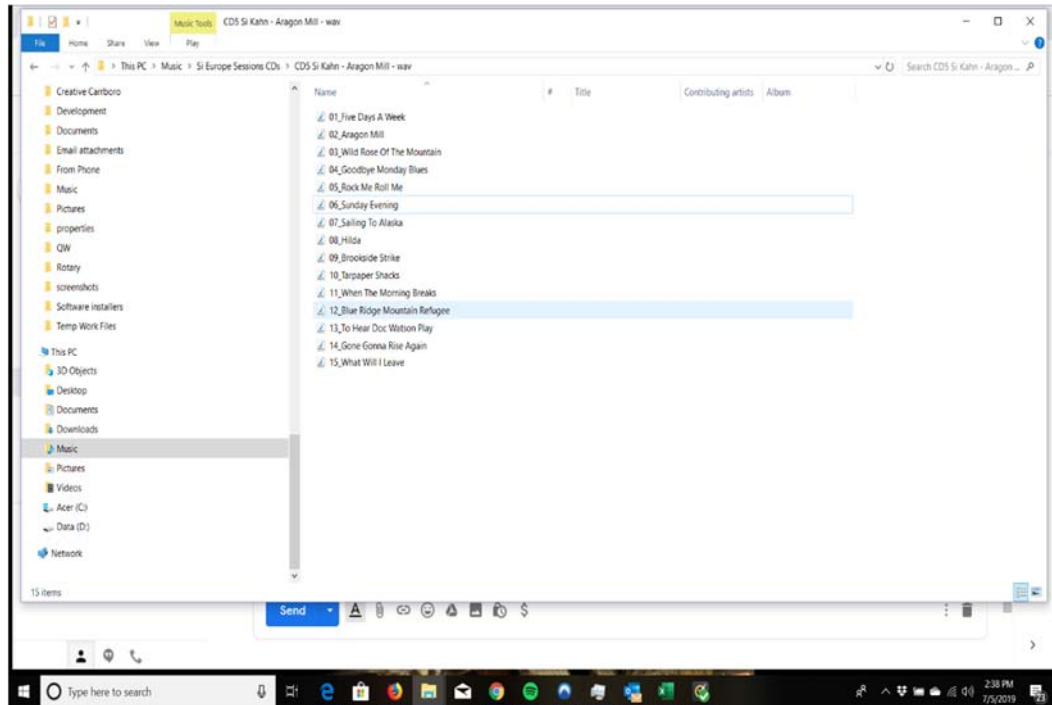
For Digital Delivery:

- a. Allow media downloads with the fewest clicks possible
 - i. Don't secure with passwords. If you have a digital release, it is on bootleg and phishing download sites all over the Net, even for a complete unknown. If it is out there, it is bootlegged or being used in phishing scheme.
 - ii. Use Bitly to create easy to remember URLs (Bitly addresses are case sensitive)
 - iii. Make digital downloads available just before the radio date.
- b. Include
 - v. The audio files at the very least as WAV and MP3 320. Preferably, FLAC as well.
 1. One can rip any of those formats from a CD.
 - vi. All other "assets":
 2. cover and all other album art
 3. PDF of liner notes
 4. one sheet,

5. track card or lyrics,
 6. any press releases
 7. Warnings and, when possible, radio edits for any track that a reasonable person could consider not “FCC-friendly.” Place a warning on the one-sheet and track card. If a grey area, not that. For example, “He was pissed off,” is totally legal since it doesn’t directly refer to the bodily function. Nonetheless, many DJs would be uncomfortable playing it and pissed off at you for not warning them. If no issues, state “All tracks FCC-friendly.”
- c. Less than 40% of DJs are download friendly, but just that reduces your costs by 40%!
- d. Digital files must be fully encoded with artist, song title, album title, record label. There are free apps to do this efficiently such as mp3tag. Without that, DJs have to take the time personally to enter the information that they need into each song. In Windows Explorer, you music should look like this:



Not like this:



Would you want to enter all that info in order to have one more album to play among the 11,000 the programmer already has between physical and digital?

Preparing Track Cards and One Sheets

These are your primary means for communicating with and enticing DJs to play a recording. They should help a producer select and talk intelligently about songs and albums.

- 1) Always include a one-sheet and either track card or lyrics or both in physical and digital formats.
 - a. Track cards are something DJs can keep with a CD, but they require work in layout and concise prose. The alternative, track sheets go on the back side of the one-sheet. They are easier to do and better for digital hosts, but cards better for CD users.
 - b. Both are to tell the DJ (or reviewer) in one of two sentences what the song is about, tempo, and style. The format is: Track number; Title, (duration), tempo and style, one or two sentences about the song
 - c. Always have a recording label. If you are releasing the album yourself, invent a name for your recording company and use it.

- 2) This is a good example of a traditional one-sheet with a separate track card. In this example, the track cards (see below) carry the track numbers, titles, and times



Guy Forsyth & Jeska Bailey
CONSPIRATORS
Release Date - July 5, 2019
Small & Nimble Records 99311

Multi-time award winner and internationally recognized Austin based musician Guy Forsyth has finally met his match. He has conspired to pair his vocals and guitar work with the femininity and incredible vocal dexterity of Jeska Bailey. This duo debut conveys emotion laid bare with harmonies that were first clandestine in nature but Guy knew they were destined to be heard and incorporated into this album. The "Conspirators" showcases roots music in its simplest form with stirring emotion, while showcasing their guitar and voices predominately with the occasional foot stomp and fiddle. With this intriguing release Forsyth & Bailey incorporate originals alongside covers they have passionately adopted and made their own.

Album highlights:

- **The Things That Matter:** The opening track, is a very powerful musical offering with Forsyth playing his signature National Resophonic Tri-Cone and lyrics that grabs the listener's attention expertly joined by Bailey during the chorus where she gently joins in on harmonies
- **Nobody Gonna Bail Me Out:** Is another original which highlights Guy's mastery of the country blues DNA
- **Daddy's Listening:** A Bailey/Forsyth original gives voice to a divorced single mother coping with an ex-husband's surveillance
- **Mercy Now:** Connects families failing struggles to an entire nation enduring the same originally written by the talented Mary Gauthier.
- **Pockets:** Deals with the death of a partner
- **Barefoot Waltz:** This bitter sweet waltz features Austin's own Warren Hood on Fiddle

Throughout this musical journey the listener is continuously challenged with obstacles people face in every day life but the engaging duo offer hope and insight. Driven by the sounds of our past and the beauty of simple roots music. "Conspirators" is an album that will please generations to come bridging the gap between young and old, traditional folk to the new indie-folk world.

The duo found themselves in the recording studio touching up and perfecting tracks that had been laid down over a year earlier while doing promotional work. "Conspirators" quickly found legs of its own as people heard the captivating songs and harmonies. The decision to preserve the simple form of the album and keep it mainly guitar and vocals was made to perpetuate the raw folk feeling one gets when listening to it. It lent itself to the album title – "Conspirators", those that conspire. Guy Forsyth is no newcomer to the stage and is currently holding the Austin Music Awards titles for 2019/2020 Best Harmonica and Best Blues title. The remarkable voice of Jeska Bailey, who married Guy early in 2018, enthusiastically looks forward to this debut album as she is introduced into the Folk world.

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www.guyforsyth.com

a. This is a traditional track card

Guy Forsyth & Jeska Bailey **CONSPIRATORS** www.guyforsyth.com

1.The Things That Matter (4:07) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps. Played on a National Tri-cone resonator guitar with slide. Written with Brian David Keane at his home in Nashville after receiving bad news about Stephen Bruton in 15 minutes. Wammo, band member of Asylum Street Spankers, helped craft the third verse. It's a minimalist form, no bridge, just simple prayers.*

2.Pockets (3:26) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps. Played on a Collings guitar. Written for Earl and Cathy Farmer, as part of Soulwriter University. Letting go is hard. We live for a moment in between the pull of gravity and spirit, taut as a bowstring till both succeed.*

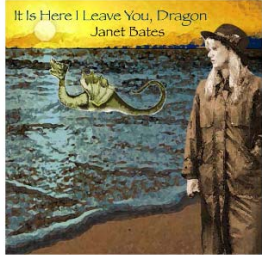
3.Daddy's Listening (4:49) *Solo guitar with vocals and foot stomp. Played on a National Tri-cone resonator guitar with slide. Blues roots and cyberbullying. Written with Jeska Bailey after finding out her conversations with her daughter had been being recorded. Written as therapy, art as revenge, truth to power.*

4.Mercy Now (5:24) *Solo guitar with voices. Mary Gauthier penned this masterpiece for her 2005 album. It was named one of the 40 saddest county songs by Rolling Stone. Jeska sends this out to her Father Ron Sheppard. We could all use some mercy now.*

5.Barefoot Waltz (4:41) *Guitar, Fiddle and voices. Guy had this song in his pocket for a long time, since just after he moved to Austin. Written for a crush who never slowed down long enough to hear it, he never wanted to record it til he met Jeska. Love means more the second time around. Blind love is the province of youth, now we must love bravely. Warren Hood is true Austin music and his fiddle playing here is all the proof you will ever need.*

6.Nobody Gonna Bail Me Out (3:31) *Solo guitar with voices and foot stomps. Played on a National Reso-rocket resonator guitar. George Rarey (Best Guitar Player in Texas) came up with the riff and I made up the words. Everyone in the world at some point comes to the realization that they are alone, what happens then is character.*

b. This example combines, on the front and back of one 8.5 x 11 sheet, one-sheet, track sheet (rather than card), and bio.



It is Here I Leave You, Dragon
Janet Bates

Ten years ago, in 2009, I began work on my last album, *LITTLE SPINNER*. That same year, I was also diagnosed with cancer. I finished and released *LITTLE SPINNER* while undergoing surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Afterward, I took a hiatus from music to heal.

Cancer is a funny thing. I think the concept of remission gets misunderstood. Essentially, you get a diagnosis, they throw the kitchen sink at you with everything that is deemed appropriate, and then you wait. We traveled to Mexico to mark the fifth anniversary of my cancer surgery, and that's where I wrote the title song for *IT IS HERE I LEAVE YOU, DRAGON*. I felt like I could finally let it go; I set that dragon out to sea. So I dedicate this album to all those who have been touched by cancer in some way.

I am so appreciative to have benefited from the help and incredible talents of Tracy Grammer, Jim Henry, Erich Kory, Joanna Peters, and my band: Mark Dievendorf and Ken Bates (also my husband). All have contributed to make this a special album. - Janet Bates

Janet Bates

It is Here I Leave You, Dragon
Release Date: July 26, 2019

- 1) It is Here I Leave You, Dragon (3:34)
- 2) Would it Still be OK? (4:18)
- 3) We Had Come Seeking Peace (3:55)
- 4) Take Your Leave (3:50)
- 5) Josephine (4:12)
- 6) Gave a Speech and No One Came (3:48)
- 7) At Least he was Able to Smile (3:50)
- 8) It is so Hard to be a Good Dog (3:31)

All songs © Janet Bates (SOCAN)
100% Canadian Content
<https://www.janetbates.com/>
Streaming on Spotify

"Janet Bates tells it like it is. Her message is brilliant, and her music wonderful." - Thom Hartmann

Featuring.....

Janet Bates: vocals
Tracy Grammer: violin, vocals
Jim Henry: bass, Dobro, guitar, mandolin
Mark Dievendorf: percussion
Joanna Peters: percussion
Erich Kory: cello
Ken Bates: guitar, bouzouki
Nicolas Maranda: bass

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The Songs on *It Is Here I Leave You , Dragon*

All songs © Janet Bates (SOCAN)

- 1) IT IS HERE I LEAVE YOU DRAGON (3:34) is a song about moving on after a cancer.
- 2) WOULD IT STILL BE OK? (4:18) is the ultimate love song, one about love enduring years, and aging, and all that can happen.
- 3) WE HAD COME SEEKING PEACE (3:55) is a song about the “right to return” march starting in April 2018, in Gaza, and how snipers shot women, children, doctors journalists, and protesters.
- 4) TAKE YOUR LEAVE (3:50) is a song about the desperate things people must do sometimes to ensure a child’s safety in war torn countries.
- 5) JOSEPHINE (4:12) perhaps a song that Napoleon might have penned from his Isle of exile questioning some choices he had made in life
- 6) GAVE A SPEECH AND NO ONE CAME (3:48) explores the utility of listening to the speeches of a leader who lies continually.
- 7) AT LEAST HE WAS ABLE TO SMILE (3:50) a story about an encounter 35 years ago in England, a man whom had worked on my mothers farm in BC when she was a child
- 8) IT IS SO HARD TO BE A GOOD DOG (3:31) I have always owned a dog, wrote this after one of my dogs did something particularly bad, wondering if he was REALLY trying to be a good dog? Of course he was, but it is hard. The song ends with a howl of our hound dog.

About the Artist, Janet Bates

“I am a singer songwriter,” says Janet Bates, “but only since the day that the US invaded Iraq in 2003. I was always musical, but had never written a song until that date. I had been inspired by the Martin Luther King and the Riverside speech when he said ‘there comes a time when silence is betrayal.....’

“When the first bombs were dropping I felt that it seemed I could do nothing. Then I remembered I DO have a voice. I was told as a youth that I sounded like Joan Baez. So I decided to write songs that gave life to the stories of those who have no voice.... the ones who have needlessly died, the poor, the

victims of violent crimes such as wars.”

Janet started out prolifically, writing and recording five albums between 2004 & 2009. All received radio airplay in many countries. She went through a major brush with cancer in 2009, recorded her 5th CD while on chemotherapy, and then began a 10 year hiatus from music.

Bates previous releases are: *A Time Has Come* (2004), *Janet Bates and the Instruments of Change - The Colours Will Come Back* (2005), *Another Child* (2006), *For All of His Wealth* (2007), and *The Little Spinner* (2009).

Following Up on Release

- 1) Track airplay and thank hosts
 - a. How to track airplay:
 - i. FolkDJ playlists
 - ii. Spintron.com - a system for logging airplay to comply with needs of SoundExchange under the DMCA - always free searching of all airplay registered with it over the most recent 24 hours.
 - iii. NACC Folk Chart - those who belong with the \$50/month deal via FAI can get weekly downloads of all folk airplay logged over one-week periods. These include, however, only the top ten from each reporter.
 - iv. Individual station and host playlists online.
 - v. Direct communications with DJs.
- 2) Follow up, but don’t be obnoxious. Persistence does not mean pestering.

- a. DJs may not get to your music for weeks. Accept that as fact about which you can do nothing. Asking if the programmer has heard the record yet does not expedite listening; it just makes you sound impatient.
 - b. Prioritize hosts with whom you have an existing relationship even if just previously playing your music and those with the greatest reach and influence
 - c. Remember that this process is also about building durable relationships for the future.
 - d. Offer liners (station IDs) and interviews as an additional way to both interact and promote.
- 3) Thanking hosts for airplay is a good way to build relationships and get feedback.
- a. She who thanks best gets the most airplay

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