

STUDY GUIDE: Thai Long Ly

This study guide is to support virtual and in-person classes for students and teachers inspired by the movie *Respect* about the life of Aretha Franklin.

Overview

Thai Long Ly is a Recording and Mix Engineer whose career has spanned over twenty years. Thai is a first generation immigrant who grew up in South Carolina. Since the area was not a hotbed for the industry, he “wasn’t in an environment that was really conducive to being in the music industry.” Also, his parents had no connections in the industry. However, these factors did not hinder his success. In this master class, Thai shares his knowledge, experience and advice about achieving success in the music industry in general and in the careers of recording and mix engineering in particular.

Learning Objectives

Students gain a nuanced perspective on recording and mix engineering careers.

Essential Questions for Reflection and Critical Thinking

- How do recording and mix engineers contribute to the recorded music we buy?
- Why is it difficult to have a successful music career? What kinds of challenges does one face?
- What role do relationships play in successful music careers?

Suggested Student Activities

What do recording and mix engineers do?

1. **Write a job description.** Imagine you want to record a song in the studio and you need to hire a recording engineer and a mix engineer.
 - Write a job description for each position that reflects all the important points you took from Thai’s master class.
 - Would you focus solely on technical skill? Why or why not?
 - What other factors are important? Why? Explain and discuss your work in small groups.
 - Produce a collaborative consolidated job description for each position.
 - Invite local recording and mix engineers to visit the class virtually, comment on how their own experience compares with the students’ ideas and share what their work looks like on a daily basis.
2. **Shadow a recording or mix engineer.** Develop a list of questions you still have about what these engineers do in the studio. For example, what other jobs are required in a professional

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recording studio and how do those jobs relate to the recording or mix engineer?

- Find local engineers or studio managers who are willing to take student groups on virtual tours of their recording studios.
- Students with strong interest in careers in this field might ask if an engineer might mentor them by allowing the student to shadow them virtually for a month.
- Students can make a video or pictorial presentation on what they learned and still want to know.

3. **Write a paper, create a presentation or tell a story** that chronicles a song from idea to iTunes.

How does one become a recording or mix engineer?

1. **Develop a resource guide.** In his master class, Thai encourages students who want to explore careers in recording or mix engineering to “absolutely start looking into it - read the books, get online, mentor with someone.”
 - Create your resource guide by gathering lists of resources that you can use to educate yourself about the music industry in general and about one or both careers in particular. You should think of this resource guide as your own personal roadmap to knowledge and as your counsel to those who might look to you for guidance. Thai suggests three categories for your resource guide: books, websites, mentors.
 - You may add other categories as you proceed or categorize your lists in another way.
 - For example, your categories might reflect the topics you want to research, like audio equipment.
 - Once you develop your resource guide, create a plan for exploring the resources you’ve gathered. As you plan, consider how much time you want to spend exploring your guide.
 - Do you want to spend a week, a month, a quarter, a year, more on it?
 - Include resources from all three categories in your plan. If you only have a week, then perhaps you’ll choose one resource from each category. If you choose to devote a year to your study, then you might focus on a different category each month.
 - Follow through on your plan. Write down and/or voice record what you’re learning as you go. Take notes on how you plan to use your knowledge and what your next steps might be. Share and discuss your journey on a regular basis with your teacher, class, family member, mentor or a mentee or apprentice - someone who wants to learn from your journey.

Here are a few resources to get you started:

[Career Communities: Mixing Engineer](#)

[Career Communities: Recording Engineer](#)

[What is the Difference Between Mixing and Mastering?](#)

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How can influencers help (or hinder) your career advancement?

In his master class, Thai alludes to the role other people played in his choice of career decisions. One of the most important things about his master class is the emphasis he puts on relationships - with family, friends and colleagues. He describes some of the challenges these relationships presented as well as the ways they contributed to his career.

Here are additional interviews in which Thai describes the role of relationships in his career:

- <https://blog.motorcycle.com/2018/12/10/motorcycle-news/thai-long-ly-is-famous/> See especially the section entitled: "Has it been a smooth road?"
- <https://shoutoutla.com/meet-thai-long-ly-music-producer-audio-engineer/>
- <http://voyagela.com/interview/meet-thai-long-ly-bell-sound-studios-los-angeles/>

1. Partner with a fellow student or form a small group and **choose one of the above articles to read and analyze.**
2. **Develop and perform a skit** that exemplifies one of Thai's influential relationships, its influence on him and the role it played in his career development.

In his master class, Thai describes the influence of two of his musical heroes: [Stanley Clarke](#) and [George Duke](#). Read about Thai's heroes.

3. **Describe Thai's relationship** with them, their influence on him and what Thai brought to the relationship.
 - Describe the kinds of relationships you would seek to cultivate and/or avoid as you develop your career in the music industry.
 - How important is it to reciprocate support?
 - How can you reciprocate and contribute to the development of others?
 - What can you do now to develop the habit of building relationships that are mutually beneficial?
 - What challenges might be standing in the way of a career in the music industry and how can you overcome them?
 - What are your top three takeaways from this master class?

Key Terms

Recording engineer, mix engineer, mastering, recording studio, career, relationships.

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