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## **Studio Insider #223**

### **Go Back and Walk**

I remember the hall monitor yelling at me because I was always in a hurry, needing to get to the next classroom, the bathroom, the playground, the principal's office. I was the little kid, the low guy in the pecking order.

“Go back and walk!”

“But I wasn't running! I was just walking fast!!”

### **Going Back Again**

The last album of my own that I released commercially was “Swanee ~ The Music of Stephen Foster.” That was in 2000.

Producing an album is expensive and time-consuming. Writing, arranging, contracting, playing, recording, editing, and mixing are all detail-oriented and demanding of my energy and creativity. When album sales provided over 50% of my income in the '80s, '90s and early 2000s, my work was paying off economically as well as creatively. But as the music industry changed dramatically throughout the '90's and 2000s, the distribution channels that I used to exploit my work commercially deteriorated and ultimately vanished. Music distributors that bought my products, and the retail outlets that they sold to all withered away, often while owing me (and my peers) large sums of money.

Of course, I still produced original film scores, as well as recorded and produced for other artists and labels (for cash on the barrel head) but the income stream from selling my own recorded music declined steadily. First file sharing, then downloads, and finally streaming ate away at the previous economic model. File sharing took the work that I and other creative types did and didn't pay us. Downloads, like iTunes, provided us a reduced sales-based income. Streaming pays rates that are laughably low. Nobody who releases music in a non-mainstream genre will be able to survive economically from streaming revenue.

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I did keep my own catalog in print, and I continue to sell my own work, although most of the sales are now retail. But even though I couldn't see an economic business model for continuing to release albums, I didn't stop writing and recording my own music.

It probably comes as no surprise that some of the great rewards from writing and producing music are not economic. The artistic release, the creative challenges and returns still make my heart glow and give me a sense of worth and artistic fulfillment.

A few years ago, I looked at my career and my body of work, and said to myself, "I'm not done. I don't feel like throwing my lifestyle out the door and going after it like 20-somethings must do today, but I do feel compelled to put together a collection of my own material, build a themed project, and make it available commercially."

But how do I do that today? Whereas I toured happily in the 1970s and '80s, I no longer feel the magic or mystery that justify living in a mini-van and motel rooms.

The answer starts with "Go back and walk."

It's time for me to re-examine the avenues of music distribution and exploitation in today's world, and make a plan. I'm not going into this foray with delusions of repeating the monetary successes I had in decades past when the music business was very different. But I will look at the existing structures for promotion, airplay, and economic opportunities that will help me get my music out to the acoustic music community.

I already have my previous CD titles on [CDBaby.com](http://CDBaby.com), which is a good site for retail sales of CDs. Of course I'm also very happy to make retail sales myself, but the paperwork, packaging and shipping can be time consuming. So, CD Baby makes great sense since they do the busy work. They also can manage digital distribution of projects, including getting them on iTunes and other download sites, and getting them up on streaming sites as well.

But I don't want to put all my CD eggs in one CD Baby basket. So I'm exploring additional avenues for distribution. Since I write this monthly column for fans and players of roots-based acoustic music who may also be interested in promoting their own work, I plan to share my

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journey as I try A, B, and C, throw out B, try D, re-imagine A, and move on to F, G, and H. I won't dwell on this every month because I'll also write about other developments in the industry and the recording worlds. But I will occasionally return to this topic as long as I can provide helpful guidance and creative suggestions for others as I discover new ways to share my original music with the public.

As for right now, I'm culling and editing the tunes for my new release, "Two Steps West of the Mississippi." There's a story behind that title, provided by my daughter Katie Weed. One time as we were driving up the coast from her home in L.A., I explained that I was having trouble finding a good title. The album is fiddle-centric, and based on my personal roots. I explained to Katie that as I developed my own playing over many years, the voices that spoke most to me came from the great country fiddlers, whose rich sounds complemented the two-step dance tunes popular in clubs and dance halls all over the west. After Katie thought about it for a minute, she said "Dad, how about "Two Steps West of the Mississippi?"

I could only agree.

To finish the project and make it ready for release, I need to track a few more final fiddle parts, edit, and finish mixing this thing.

OK — time to go warm up these old fingers.

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**Joe Weed** records acoustic music at his Highland Studios near Los Gatos, California. He has released six albums of his own, produced many projects for independent artists and labels, and does scores for film, TV and museums. Joe's composition "Hymn to the Big Sky" was heard in "The Dust Bowl," a film by Ken Burns, which premiered nationally on PBS. Joe recently produced "Pa's Fiddle," a collection of 19th-century American music played by "Pa" Charles Ingalls, father of Laura Ingalls Wilder, the author of the "Little House on the Prairie" book series. Reach Joe by email at [joe@highlandpublishing.com](mailto:joe@highlandpublishing.com), or by visiting [joeweet.com](http://joeweet.com).