

The FretMonkey Records Story: A Record Label with a Mission

Although FretMonkey Records (FMR) did not officially form as a business until November of 2015, the journey began many years ago. The answer will vary depending on whether you ask owners, Dennis Cotabish or his step-son, Kevin (Blake) Goodwin. You see, both men fell in love with music in their early teens. As teen guitar enthusiasts, they played independently and in bands. In 2000, when Dennis married Blake's mother, Alicia, a former guitar player herself, music was destined to be a common family bond for all.

In 2015, Blake began entering a series of acoustic fingerstyle guitar competitions and participating in master guitar classes across the country. Later that summer, he won the Canadian Fingerstyle Guitar Competition in Kingston, Ontario. With the expectation of producing an album, and frustration related to the insular nature of the music industry (e.g., you have to know people) as well as attempts to coordinate a variety of production and promotion services, Dennis and Blake conceptualized a "full service audio and music video production experience" that would essentially serve as a one-stop studio that would meet all of the needs of professional musicians as well as up and coming artists. In response, the FretMonkey Records studio was formed and Dennis and Blake built a state-of-the-art recording studio at their home surrounded in a resort-like setting. However, it was an inspired vision of uniting talented musicians across the globe under one record label as collaborating artists who guide the operation of the label that led to the unique formation of FretMonkey Records label.

The Mission of the FretMonkey Records Label

It is our belief that the fingerstyle community is the best. We are the most supportive group of musicians in the industry...hands down. However, very few record labels in the acoustic guitar community exist. Traditionally, record labels in the music industry serve as gatekeepers and most artists are shut out, a decision affecting the fate and future of very talented musicians everywhere. Being a small community of fingerstyle artists, having so few labels to choose from comes as no surprise. In response, FretMonkey Records was formed. But we wanted to be more than just a typical record label. We wanted to serve a greater purpose and resolve some of the pressing issues that artists typically face today. Increasingly, the industry takes financial advantage of artists. In the end, everyone seems to make money but the artist. As a result, musicians are never in the position to support themselves financially as musicians (and most have to secure outside full-time employment elsewhere to support their families). FretMonkey Records wanted to attempt to solve this problem, or at least impact it. Moreover, fingerstyle artists are a small group of musicians and typically have a difficult time drawing large audiences and ticket sales. FretMonkey Records wants to solve this by expanding its following by including artists that are similar in style, but different – we consider these folks our cousins. Lastly, and most importantly, FretMonkey views the artist as the most important contributor and asset to the business model...therefore, they should be guiding the label. What we found along the way were 19 other notable and emerging fingerstyle musicians who felt exactly the same way. Let me explain.

During a critical point in building the FretMonkey Records studio, artists began reaching out to us about creating a label. Not just any label, but an artist-driven label. It had been brewing in the hearts and minds of many, but there was no vehicle or entity to bring them all together. The

concept evolved and catapulted into a greater vision. This vision was to bring like-minded individuals across the world together to challenge the status quo of the music industry, and attempt to do something that had never been done before...to develop a label where artists guide the entire operation of the label. Sound ridiculous? We think not!

How does this work?

The label functions entirely through an artist collaboration model. All FretMonkey Records collaborating artists make up the labeled entity of FretMonkey Records. As a result, collaborating artists serve as the FMR advisory board and are granted equal voting rights. As advisory board members, artists meet regularly to discuss business related to the label, vote on new artists to the label, address the issues they have encountered in the industry (as independent artist and FMR artists), and attempt to solve and respond to these through a collective, powerful voice. This means that the FretMonkey Label, including the model, products, and services evolve over time according to advisory board votes and serve as one collective voice under the FMR label. This also means that if the proposed resolutions can be financially accomplished and is in the best interest of the label, FMR will attempt to make it happen. Collectively, we truly believe that we can change the trajectory of how the music industry conducts business with artists. If there is something we don't like, the artists (under the label), we will try to change it. We function as a guild (for a lack of a better term), a big strong voice in our community and beyond. All FretMonkey Records artists have access to half-priced audio and music video production services as well as a menu of options that include promotion, tour, and management services. Most importantly, we have built a model where the artist picks and chooses their services, options, monetization, etc. Once again, FretMonkey Records is artist-driven and will most likely make some heads spin.

As an advisory board member, labeled artists can submit an artist for consideration for the label which will be voted upon by the entire advisory board. To date, the artist collaboration program is selective, however, we are not exclusive (meaning that we do not aim to be elitists or exclude musicians). We have a Guest Featured Artist program where any musician can pay to be featured on the website and across our social media channels. This opportunity will allow artists to have exposure to our fans. Artists who demonstrate great potential through our featured artist program will be considered for the artist collaboration program. It's a great opportunity for musicians to get their foot in the back door and onto the FMR label.

When recruiting, we are looking for artists who believe in our mission, can elevate the FMR label (benefiting both the individual artist and other FMR artists), bring followers to the FMR website and social media channels, have a deep commitment to their artistry, and above all - demonstrates both professional and ethical practices.

How does the business model work?

Your next question may be how we will keep the lights on. It's a good question and one we have given great thought. In addition to our Guest Featured Artist program, FMR sells its audio and music production services to the general public for full price. In addition, our artists will tour regularly and will participate in a number of partnership activities. Coupled with innovative marketing strategies, we anticipate that FretMonkey Records will not only succeed, but expand in the coming years.

About Our Artists

Currently, we have 19 artists which include 17 fingerstyle guitarists, one singer/songwriter, and one band. Eight of the 17 fingerstyle guitarists are Stonebridge artists. We think they are some of the most talented musicians on the planet. Many have won or placed in some of the most prestigious acoustic guitar competitions in the world. Beyond the United States, we have several artists that reside in Canada, the UK, Turkey, India, and Italy. Our diversity doesn't end there. We have artists who play contemporary fingerstyle music and others who play progressive style music, and a mix of those who play something in between. Moving forward, we will continue to look for and expand our view of fingerstyle music.

The FretMonkey Records Team

Although FretMonkey Records is a family-owned business, the day-to-day operations of FretMonkey Records are ran by a team of individuals. The FMR administrative team's goals include securing additional opportunities for the labeled artists by creating business partnerships within the larger industry, promoting artists through innovative marketing, and engaging followers with original content. Blake Goodwin serves as the Manager of the studio and record label. He guides the operation of the business and coordinates all efforts between team members. Mark Grover is the Artist Relations representative for the label. His role involves securing endorsements for artists and developing partnerships with businesses and interested individuals. Elliot Prestwich, from Image Punch Entertainment, serves as the FretMonkey Records tours and promotion agent and is heavily involved in bringing the vision of FretMonkey Records to fruition. Alicia Cotabish works in marketing and advertising, and serves as a liaison between the artists and other personnel. Blake's wife, Brooke, is in charge of FretMonkey Records merchandising and social media marketing. Dennis Cotabish is the Chief Financial Officer of the business.

About the Studio

The studio was acoustically designed to industry standards with outside studio engineering consultation. It is large one-room studio equipped with a variety of the very best software and hardware in the industry. It is also designed to house artists who are recording on site and includes hotel-like accommodations with a full bathroom and other amenities. We offer free housing to those who are recording on site. The studio also includes access to an outside bar and entertainment area, and a stunning pool. It's a very unique and beautiful setting. In regard to services, FretMonkey Records offers full-service audio and music video production services which also includes burning, printing, replication, and duplication services. We can essentially do almost everything in-house.

General Studio services include:

- Audio recording, mixing, and mastering
- Professional Studio Session Music Videos
- Multi-media Music Videos
- Music Video Teasers (preview videos produced for social media channels)
- Album/EP Production (Burn, Printing, Replication, Duplication)
- Access to Session Musicians (e.g., drummers, saxophone players, etc.)
- Access to Guitar Tech and Luthier services while recording

- Guest Featured Artist and Recording Artist Promotional Services on the Fret Monkey Website and Social Media Channels
- Free Promotional CD Release Party at FretMonkey Records studio where the recording artist will have the option to play for invited guests.

In Summary...

At the end of the day, the FretMonkey Records team aspires to be true to our delegated mission and to the artists that we represent. Our artists hope to leave a legacy, or at least a footprint, on the music industry - maybe even impact how the larger industry conducts business with musicians. We want them to succeed. To make it possible, it is our responsibility to keep the label financially sound so we can keep the lights on and pay the bills...so they can make their incredible music and continue doing what they love.

To follow our journey, visit the FretMonkey Records website at www.fretmonkeyrecords.com and all social media channels.

The FMR promotional video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bf76r1tsLMQ>

