



Mixing And Producing

Oliver Ganslandt - Spark The Music

Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

Welcome to the book that may be a turning point of your music-making Journey! We will learn not just the basics of music production that all the pros know, but also find out about certain "hacks," "sweet-spots," and understandings of both techniques and processes—that will all work together to skyrocket the impact of your music productions.

We will begin really soon, but just to give you a hint into who I am - the author of this book and creator of Spark The Music - I'm going to give you a short, small background so that we can get to know each other.

My name is Oliver Ganslandt. I have 20+ years of music-making experience and have written probably over 10,000 songs if you count all the sketches and ideas. I have at two different times looked at the number of phone recordings I've made and counted over 8000 recordings. Two times, on two different phones. So roughly 16.000 sketches. I have released hip-hop tracks on Spotify, spiritual singer/songwriter songs, EDM, as well as been in different bands. Manganas Garden—with millions of streams and plays, Johns Vatten - (a Swedish indie pop band), Walk On Waves, and The Blank Page.

On Spotify you can find me as:

Wildchild (EDM)

Wing (Hip Hop)

Oliver Ganslandt (Singer/Songwriter)

Freedom Recordings (Miscellaneous Projects.)

Bands:

Maganas Garden (Disco Funk Band)

Johns Vatten (Indie Pop)

Walk On Waves (Reggae Pop & Rock)



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I play guitar, bass, the drums, keys, sing - mix and produce (also an instrument if you ask me) - the language of music is the same on all instruments if you ask me. So picking up a new one is just a matter of seeing how you, on that particular instrument, make the same music come out. The pattern of the music is always the same. How to get it out on a different instrument is just a matter of learning how that particular instrument works and how to play it.

And I write songs and lyrics.

Now I am going to teach you everything basically - that I've learned over these 20+ years of working with music. And when I say work - I really do mean play.

Music is PLAYED.

I have also lived as a busker for a couple of years in Sweden earning my whole living on playing music freely on the streets. I have worked as a music teacher in the public school system and I was basically playing music since birth. (I made drumkits out of the kitchen ware items just a couple of years old.

This was a background on who I am and what I have been doing so far relating to music

Other than music I've been a thinker, a seeker and a philosopher even though that word rings a bit funny in today's day and age. I always sought the deeper answers, and the patterns to everything.

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After due diligence, I have found these patterns of music.

And let me say - they are easier to understand than you might think.

And before I move on about those patterns, maybe I should add something that I haven't even myself thought about until very recently. I have what we label as ADHD, which somehow relates to the autism spectrum. This I will not delve deeply down into, but let's just say this - it is basically existing on a different wavelength than most people. Not better and not worse. Just different. And this makes for almost a constant feeling of loneliness relating to "other" human beings. And even though I was often "the popular kid" growing up with tons of friends and having an easy time with people - socially - there was always a feeling of just being different. Of not NATURALLY "vibrating" at the same wavelength as most others. And because of this I've had a weird feeling of being never alone when I'm alone - but basically always feeling a bit alone around people. People whom I haven't known for very long at least. Old friends since childhood feels like home though.

Why am I telling you this? Because I think this has been a major part in making me so gravitated to music. Because through the music - I've always felt like things make sense. It's like I'm in my element. And so now you know a short backstory that might perhaps, be a little bit funny to know about - because you will, independently of who you are - now learn music - making "secrets" from somebody who has been the "hermit in the cave". It's almost like you have climbed a weird, mystical mountain and now the autistic "genious savant" will speak.

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(I know you cannot call yourself a genius but well... Please read between the lines lol. I wrote that to perhaps instill a feeling that you might have found something rare. And it actually is. - The "weirdo" who had a hard time with other things but because of that went deeper than most in music - now shares everything.)

Perhaps that last part was actually a bit weird to write. But okay. Let's drop the talking about me and go into the actual subject matter!

Back to the patterns!

It's not that music actually is very hard to understand, if you approach it from the right way. It's just that we have for the longest time had a general music educational tradition that builds basically completely on the notational system and what? Thinking logically as your primary sense! Hearing, feeling and LISTENING has not been the primary sense through which we understand and LEARN anyways, music through. We rely on almost mathematical models, that becomes like a slow-churning, heavy and dense, clogging modality that comes in between you and your ability to be in the moment with the music. And use your LISTENING and FEELING primarily.

I could rant for hours about this.

That system is designed to be perfect for a single composer to instruct hundreds of people at the same time, EXACTLY how to play something. The whole premise is that you follow, exactly, what, it, says, on, a, paper.

The primary sense isn't your ears, your listening.

You are to simply, and in a brutally exact manner, repeat, *exactly* what it says on the paper.

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Having this as the main outlook already makes music-making a lot harder. Because none of that is built on the primary sense that any and ALL GREAT musicians have - and play from.

Your ears. Your feeling. Your intuitive senses. Your being in the moment. And feeling the movement, feeling the nuances, TALKING with your instrument, and talking WITH the other sounds and musicians that are playing with you. You literally HAVE to have this ability to be a really great musician. And yet, we might spend 10 years in musical school and basically have zero really high level understanding of this taught to us. The skillsets it takes to be SUCH a musician, is simply basically just not really there in what we learn in our contemporary (not really contemporary) musical education.) It's basically never prioritized anyways. Not on the most foundational level. If it was, then we would learn in a completely different way. And I will show you THIS way. What it should be. Naturally - because we study MUSIC, and not math. This is really easy to understand once you get a slight feel for the point I'm making, I would think. But text only goes so far too - it's when we HEAR - AND - make the connections of this "new paradigm" (that isn't new at all really) - that we can learn lightning fast - and become the greatest ACTUAL musicians that we could be. Not just repetition "slaves".

We are given the skillsets to play like robots would. And anybody who "breaks free" of those "mental" shackles, will usually have done so because of a spirit of their own - they yearned so much for what music is and can be, that they went OUTSIDE of the current paradigm. They found the real musical experience even though the systems most commonly used were basically a little bit stupid. I'm just brutally honest. Actually really stupid for most cases where it is applied, if you ask me.

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To see thousands and thousands of people doing something in a way that makes the "thing" hader than it actually is.

Makes my "autistic" brain rage in a certain way, both humourous and almost like a rebellious way. But I know I cannot lead anything to anywhere good by screaming and calling people stupid (lol) - they are not of course but the system is - I have to show people something that works better than the old thing. And this is what I will do through Spark The Music - and this book. Parts of musc-making atleast as it relates to this book since this one is tilted towards the mixing and production aspect of it.

I am happy to tell you that not only is the way of learning how to play music freely that you will learn here much more fun than fighting with notation.

The case just so happens to be that it is BRUTALLY much more simple to learn, aswell.

When we bypass the "idea" that we need to conceptually learn music through understanding the notational language first, the circle of fifths, the different keys and how to read and write them, and mathematically try to find our way into the language of music, we find a revelation that is quite delicious.

The pattern is the same everywhere. Contemporary classical music education just so happens to make it much harder than it is.

You have no need to know different ways of mathematically explaining what you are doing, in a way that is complicated at all.

Everything in music can be explained much, much easier.

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Instead of traditional music theory - for example when we are trying to understand keys - all you need is to learn and remember and FEEL, what...

4...

Different Chords FEEL LIKE.

FEEL LIKE.

To start off with.

It's no different basically from remembering the taste - in your mind alone - that a strawberry, a lime, a piece of chocolate and a pineapple has. (I just made up some fruit flavours as an example.)

Because these 4 main, pillar, chord feels, as I refer to them (Traditionally known as Chord Functions.) constitute already something like 80% of chords played.

What do I mean by Chords played?

I literally mean that if you would look up all songs currently released - on Spotify and everywhere else - something like 80% of it all will be these FOUR CHORD FEELS.

FOUR OF THEM.

And when you know what they feel like, in relationship to one another - that will have been the first step into your journey to learn how to not only speak music fluently as a language - but also, second, be the single most important skill to have as a musician, even at professional levels. It really is like that.

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You can literally approach music from the contemporary way in music education that means you will train your capacity for repetition. Repeating what others have told you to play, and play it exactly like they have told you.

Or you can decide that you want to learn how to SPEAK IT FREELY.

If you were in a conversation with somebody I'm quite sure you'd prefer to be freely capable of expressing yourself rather than having to read a note and repeat what it says on there.

(We will yes, get into mixing and production soon - do not worry - but these understandings make up the foundation of MUSIC UNDERSTANDING - and mixing is ALL about understanding MUSIC. It is vastly less predominantly a *technical* thing, than it is a *felt* thing. (But in that *feeling*, there will of course be a myriad of technical understandings and abilities and skills that can help you bring about BETTER feeling music. It's all connected.

I would say music is the archaetypical language.

It, in it's nature basically NEED to have a freely flowing, deliberate quality to it.

Otherwise it would be like kissing somebody but having to follow each little movement in it by reading a note first.

(And perhaps even going back from the beginning and doing it the same way, exactly again. - Perhaps 10-15 times in a row and expect it to feel authentic and deliberate that last time when you have done it the exact same way so many times in a row.)

You want the music to be YOURS to say with what YOU WANT.

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And this is why you are here probably.

Happy news - You are about to get to learn music-making from what it should be. Based on your listening and *feel*, from day 1.

No overburdening, overbearing - complicated and technical, mathematically advanced theory that will be like a blockage in front of your feeling.

The theory we will learn is simply the easiest possible way to explain what the music is.

But the big difference will be that here in Spark The Music, we will be approach it through the senses that are natural for musical understanding.

Your LISTENING.

And the first step will be to learn and memorize 4 different Chord Feels. - That is when you are trying to understand and learn the MUSIC in it self - but more on that in other books. In this one we will focus on the mixing and production aspects of music - making.

But we will still just briefly dive into this so that you might get an overall understanding of the greater picture here that we are working with. As a mixer and producer, the only thing you will basically ever be judged by, is how your music feels. And so just re-affirming this, you might save a lot of confusion for another time regarding what the actual goal of your MIXING and PRODUCTION will be.

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I'm saying this because you might in your actual sessions remember this and have like a "shield" that keeps you from falling into the various traps in it such as:

Mixing with you eyes and not your ears.

Mixing with rules in mind that makes you end up choosing mixing moves that actually makes the music feel *less* good, but following "the right" principles.

Looping around in circles having a hard time to finish things because your process doesn't have a sturdy enough "anchor" of direction, thus making you second guess yourself a lot more than you need to.

Mixing needs so be approached through *feel*. And the technical aspects and skillsets of it exists for you to be ABLE to bring out your FEEL, even more.

So before we go deeply into the mixing and production skillsets and understandings, let's just paint the picture of the basic understanding of MUSIC, first.

By continuing with the concept of the *Chord Feels*. Let's go!

The 3 remaining basic Chord Feels to add to the 4 primal ones will be added just afterwards you've learned the 4 main ones - and when you have all 7, you basically will have a better feel for music in regards of how to play it freely, than you would get in many music schools after years. If you learn these feels as a solid unit, where the FEELING of them - and your muscle memory and understanding and skill of where to place your fingers and so on - can operate like one unit. Just as when you have a thought and then speak it. You do not have to search for the words, and you do not have to manually control your tongue.

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Music is so much easier than it is mostly taught to be. And we will teach it to you here at Spark The Music.

We have for hundreds of years for some funny reason (I have my ideas) decided to make what really isn't very complicated, much, much more complicated than it actually is. (I will go deeper into why this is, and sharing more branches of these thoughts in other books.)

The musical language follows a pattern that repeats and repeats itself. It's the same as high as you can go, and as low as you can go.

It's just the instruments that have unique placements of frets and keys and buttons to press so that different scales will require a different pattern on the instrument.

But this is no harder to learn than basically looking at a domino sequence, and seeing that after this step, comes that step.

And hey - after 7 steps - the pattern repeats gain.

So in this book and through our materials - we will show you the NATURAL PATH to learn music-making.

This book will be tilted towards Mixing and Production but general themes of music-making will be taught in here to.

Art is basically always the same.

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A painter often puts one thing in focus, and the rest of the painting supports the central theme and figure. Or at least to HAVE one thing in focus, other things might take more of a background role to amplify the effect. A chef wants to blend flavours to be a nice overall experience, where a blend of sweet, sour, salt and so on will be there generally, but also a little bit different for each dish. A musician and mixer blends frequencies just in the same way.

You know how much lows you want based on the mids and the highs. And you know just EXACTLY what micro-level adjustments you want to make on the kick drum, based on what the OTHER things in the mix sound like. And it usually starts with some kind of a focal point, because our human perception basically likes to focus at one thing at a time. So we might decide that the vocals, supported by the piano will be the main focal point of the song, and THAT is what makes us decide on how loud the other elements should be. Do you see?

It's all a dance between different elements forming a whole. And through this *feel* - we can then know how much lower we want some other parts of the music to be, than that vocal and the piano. It's all a unified piece of art we are making, that consists of different parts, forming the whole. And when we say how much lower, it's a *felt* thing - you do not reach the "right" decisions here based on any numbers or rules that are an exact science. Ever. And so this can be your first take-away from this book to memorize. It's NEVER, basically about the numbers.

(Except perhaps for when you send a finished track to a streaming platform where a track that is too loud will cause the streaming platform to compress your track to keep it in check and thus altering the sonic properties.)

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Other than these things, thinking too much in terms of numbers and "rules" will only make you a less intuitive mixer. And focus on the "wrong" things. Mixing and production is a *felt* thing.

It's so much about taste - your taste, and knowing and learning how to bring out your internal visions. And this it's all very dynamic. Learning new skillsets can boost your inspirations to create new things, and feeling a huge desire for getting some vision or idea out of you might be what propels you to learn greater technical abilities. So there is a dance here going on between a *yin*, and a *yang*. Like everywhere else. There is both a technical side to this but also a much more *felt* side. And it is only when these complementary sides are dancing together that we can reach mastery of this art form.

Some of it is intentional. A lot of it happens because of creative "fluke". You might load up a new sound, click the wrong button and BAM - "Whoa I just have to make a song using THIS!" - and so on.

It's all a journey of immersion. You learn things that goes often - like "rules" but then you see the place of the "rules" - they are there to support the visions. To make even better music come to be.

It's all a dance.

We call these Form & Feel where the Form is the yang aspect and the Feel is the yin aspect.

It is the dance between these two principles that makes you able to reach the *flow state*. And that is where your greatest work can basically "appear" before you, when you are just doing what you think is fun - and having fun like that continuously and with consistency.

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This dance is what we will teach you.

And the unique approaches that goes for each side.

And base it all on YOU and your own unique, individual feeling. Everybody is different, with different strokes of genius. We here here to help bring it out.

I cannot begin to explain how happy I am to get to share all of these secrets, insights, and "hacks" with you since music has basically been my biggest passion for life. I find that music is a shortcut into places that are much harder to reach in other ways. It's like a direct language of feeling. And it makes you FEEL what it is saying. You do not have to think at all. And when multiple people hear the same music at the same time, they naturally "arrive" in the same united experience. Music can change the vibe of a room. How you feel.

And movies, if you think about it, are basically COMPLETELY dependent on the sounds. A horror movie with humorous music would take away more than half of the "horror" in it. And vice versa, if you added scarry, uncanny musical piece to a happy movie, it would turn out extremely creepy. And nothing would have changed except the music added to the moving picture.

Just to paint the picture of how great an art form music is. And how much it can affect things.

And so through this book you will learn about things to help you produce the music of YOUR DREAMS. With the biggest emotional impact, the hardest-hitting grooves, and the overall most pro-sounding sonics.

Are you ready to dive in? We will get right into everything about **mixing** great music on the next page.

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Glad to have you here—let's get your music-making to the next level!

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🎵 Mixing Basics

All great mixes have some things in common.

1. You have good level balances (judged by feel—not entirely technical, but also a bit technical sometimes).
2. Nice spatial placements (EQ'ing as well as reverberation and time effects such as delay).
3. Good separation so that each element is not "covered" by other sounds in a "messy, clogged way".
4. A good feel for contrast (louder vs. quieter moments, for example but can also be relative contrast between different elements within the mix).
5. Panning. Placing various elements in a Left - Center - Right stereo image. A.k.a stereo balance.

And a "bonus" point - The overall "vibe" of the track. This might not always be discussed as a main mixing aspect but i'd say that it's basically the MAIN one. It is more ethereal than the others, directly connected to inspiration and creativity and a bit less technical in nature - but draws on your technical knowledge potentially too, where your technical knowledge backs it up.

These 5 + 1 aspects are mastered by every great mixing engineer and producer and are occurring in every really good mix of a song.

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I cannot begin to explain how excited I am to share everything I've learned about music production and mixing.

Let's just dive RIGHT IN. And waste NO TIME. Let's get you making HITS as soon as possible!

I cannot begin to explain how important a good mix is for a track. If the mix is great, then it will not only give the track/song the opportunity to shine through as its best "self," but also make people get the "instant" kind of "wow, this music is serious and interesting" kind of a "status."

If your mix is off, then people might naturally get a "hmm, great music, but meh, not quite there yet; keep up the good work, and you will get there kind of vibe".

Vs. If your mix is really great and stands up to the charts and the best possible mixing in the commercial songs out there, then whatever your music is, it will be taken more seriously.

(And get people into that "Wow, what a great track experience.")

Okay. Let's not dwell on why it is so important to have great mixes, but instead let us learn HOW TO GET THERE.

I will teach you the single most important thing when it comes to learning how to make great mixes and also sharing the music that really gets people into their musical ecstasy.

You must learn the "sound of music."

Read that again.

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Let's get right into it!

On the next page we will start with the single most important aspect of a mix and also your most powerful tool as a mixer.

Can you guess what it is?



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Fader balances

This thing alone makes more of an impact on your mixing than basically anything else you can possibly learn. And this refers simply to the levels you assign to each track/element of the mix. Play with this a lot. AND! Realize that TINY, TINY, TINY changes often can be what makes the mix "click" into place totally. Just simply finding that EXACTLY "RIGHT" fader level will often make the sound "be what it should be" in the mix. This can sometimes mean looking for the right volume on a kick drum by changing between -2 and -2.1 dB.

It is really like a revelation. You can play with all kinds of weird effects and fancy techniques all day long, but when you realize the micro-level adjustment principle, you can get sounds to "sit" really well in the mix and also sound really great, using nothing else than the faders.

This is what you HAVE to learn and get good at, basically first. (Doesn't have to be first as a rule you absoluteley need to adhere to, by IF you learn THIS first, well, every other aspect of the mix will be able to build on this. - And, you will likeley need much, much less second guessing yourself and making all kinds of crazy attempts fo "fix" mixes with advanced effects or other fancy complicated tools - and often getting worse results - when your fader balances and levels are on point already. This is the simple most important aspect of mixing.

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Because with this alone, you can make something like 80% of your mix.

So play with this! See if you can get a track before you and just using basically nothing else than the faders that control the volume of each element of the track and so on, to sit EXACTLY where it sounds the best to you.

(Here VIBE comes in.)

There are no "required" levels as rules, but really, how do you FEEL about what? The... MUSIC!

What makes the BEST POSSIBLE MUSIC some alive? So sit with your fader and tune it up or down until you FEEL that "DANG!"—"Now ""it just feels "right" - moment. And how do you find it? Is it solely through some rules you should follow?

Well, there could be a few indications in general advice, but any general advice will always try to achieve the best MUSIC possible. That is the only purpose of any "rules". But to give you the main "rule" here still - it's all about HOW you listen while tuning your fader volumes. You listen to the OTHER things in the mix to get informed about what would be the "right" kick drum volume. And you will probably already ask: But if nothing is established in the mix, how can I listen to any other things when they have't been given defined places yet? Well - The process is ongoing throughout. You can go back and forth, and from A to B as well. You can follow your feeling for the music as you are listening and just get basic level balances in first. You will probably not need to get the first adjustment into a perfect place, but when you have gone through the track, and adjusted enough times, enough elements based on your FEELING for the song, now you will start to get a better overall picture of what the song is.

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And generally this isn't as complicated as it might sound because most often you will have ONE, two or three really prominent, central elements in the mix that will be the "most important ones" to in themselves sound really good. But when these three things let's say sound really well, the other elements in the mix are actually often there to make THESE three things sound even better, or should we say to make them shine as much as they can. And that can often be achieved by simply setting the perfect volume of let's say a backup vocal or guitar so that it is actually LOW enough, to make the vocal in question pop out and shine as much as it can.

And so an exercise you can do it to just get a track before you where you have a vocal in it for example, if it is a vocal driven track, and just try this out: You listen to the vocal actually, when you are sweeping up or down - your fader for let's say a piano. And you will probably very poignantly be able to tell when your piano has gotten to LOUD, and thus drenching the vocal, or also, so low in volume that not the song just feels like it doesn't make sense, like it's not feeling right. Now you find a zone where you're in between too loud and too low. Somewhere in here, in this zone, you will find your perfect volume.

But actually, when you've made this exercise - you do not have to repeat this too overtly, but it will be instilled as second nature soon enough. You sweep a fader up, or down, and listening to the MAIN elements in the mix, you go up and down naturally until you find that exact place where the OTHER, LEAD ELEMENT shines the most. And here you will also be able to draw on your perhaps "soon to have" knowledge in the other segments of this book because for example frequency carving using an EQ for example, can achieve necessary results here too. Let's say there is just simply too much bass in the piano, and it is also just a bit too nasal sounding - then you can utilize an EQ to make the piano less bassy and less nasal sounding. And thus also making it sit better with the vocal. But back to fader balances!

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So listen to the MUSIC as you tune your fader up or down, and just FEEL how you FEEL about the music, and "the music", by that we mean both the totality of the mix you can hear, the other elements in the mix that are the most "important ones" but also the music that you hear INSIDE you, and want to bring out. It can be that anyways. Often you will have slight ideas, or even really vivid ones potentially - about what you want the song to feel like. And based on all of these things - you adjust each element to get closer to it, like a stone mason would chisel away at a stone to bring out the statue in it.

Sometimes you could find, let's say, two versions within the song as you are tuning the fader for your kick drum as an example. One version makes a certain FEEL of the song come forth by going lower with the kick drum, and another vibe comes across through a much LOUDER kick drum. It's all about the music, and what you are here to do as a producer is simply to bring out YOUR FEEL, YOUR TASTE, YOUR VIBE. So it's always about the MUSIC. Feel the music. The better you feel about the MUSIC, the better your mixing is.

And here we could brutally trail off onto every other thing in mixing, because already at the stage of fader balances being tuned, you might KNOW, through experience and imagination - that yeah... "This is a great singer/songwriter track right now but man... I know that a certain hard-hitting drum sound and pattern will get people going almost like clockwork, like a recipe almost - hmm... Perhaps I dial those in right as the second part of the verse hits..."

And because of that knowledge and experience you might AS YOU ARE TUNING YOUR FADERS - make mixing choices based on those "invisible ideas" - that you can hear in your mind already.

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But we will try to keep this book a little bit cohesive to the chapter format. So more on these "deeply connected" various aspects later, as the book continues.

But to get back to the main point here regarding HOW we mix and right now, concerning the fader balances - how good you feel about the MUSIC being made - is basically the only tell of how well you have mixed it.

How good the MUSIC feel.

This is the vastly dominant important aspect.

We do have technical things that can be great to know about as well. The nuances of these things will probably get clearer as the book continues!

On the next page we will continue with something that is essential for a mix to have that space, and the feeling that you are listening to something that is "alive", "breathing", original, authentic - and multi-dimensional.

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Spatial Placement.

Where in the "room" are the elements of your mix? If everything "stands" in the middle of the "stage" - where perhaps the lead singer "should" be, then everything that is in the mix will be competing for the same place and competing WITH EACH OTHER.

There wouldn't be a clear way to hear or appreciate the lead singer because the drumkit stood right on her, as well as the bass dude trying to stand in the same spot. And then we shouldn't talk about the guitarists and the PIANO... You get the idea, I think.

If everything "stands" in the middle where the lead singer "should be" -

(Perhaps should be.)

- Then everything that is in the mix will be competing for the same place and be competing WITH EACH OTHER. I wrote that two times. It's worth a second mention right away.

In a nice mix and a great band as well, everyone wants to make music TOGETHER, not competing with one another.

So see if you can disperse elements of the mix into the frequency spectrum and also the in the spatial feel so that everything works together, not against each other. (A simple example would be if a bass is twice as loud as everything else and has basically all the frequencies in it—lows, highs, and mids—then it would probably drown out something else in the mix.

(And this is not to be taken as a rule that is a MUST, but rather a basic principle that so OFTEN makes the mix sound better..)

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This effect can be adjusted a lot by playing with the brightness of the sounds, because the brighter a sound is, the more "close to us" we perceive it to be. If something happened 100 m away from you, you would not hear as much brightness in that sound, even if it was a really bright sound, but if it was right next to your ear, you could hear really high-pitched frequencies within the sound.

And using reverbs and delays too, of course, places different elements as if they were in a room with reverberation in it, in various styles depending on the delay/reverb type you are using. Both delay and reverb are essentially the sound being replicated in time; after a transient, for example (the "hit," the "first" part of the sound), there will then be echoes of that transient sound that repeat after it. A reverb plugin would create hundreds of little copies of the sound and put them so close to one another, after the sound, that it sounds like a continuous reverberation. A delay would basically do the same thing but generally make the replications of the initial sounds in a much more spread-out way so that you hear the individual replicas as distinct, unique echoes of the first sound. Usually reverb comes from the room you are in. And a reverb plugin will often try to sound like this. The reverb plugin tries to emulate the sound of being in a space.

And this can be very much done in the recording stage already if you are recording a band, for example. If the drums, for example, are recorded with a simple mic setup and the mics are not very close to the drum kit, then you will have a more reverberant, ambient sound that naturally allows other elements to stand more in the middle. And if you record something really close up, then you can have a much easier time making that element much more "center stage."

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And an almost "weird" thing you can also try is to just see what happens when you saturate the entire mix, or excite it with an exciter plugin. (This is not the basic, rudimentary and essential "layer" of skill but more of a fun thing to try, because sometimes the entire feeling of the relationships of the different, various elements in the mix can feel vastly different when we have used saturation or excitement. Also compression can have this effect. But the general "rule" would be the opposite basically - the better the separation - the more saturation is even *possible* to add because if we had poor separation in the track everything would get very muddy, cluttered and thick when boosting the harmonic overdrive of the track which saturation does. So this thing with using an exciter plugin on the mixbus or the master bus is more like a "trick" you can try if you want to see what's possible within the track in a creative way.

And here I will just throw in two different approaches I've heard about. This is actually not something I have made up on my own:

Some might add processing to the entire track basically first, or really early, and then let that compression/saturation/excitement/limiting - whatever it might be - be there, left on throughout the entire mixing session and inform every mixing choice. Others might add such "mix bus" processing as it is commonly referred to as, at much later stages. I can however say that no choice is the "right" one. Both works. But I will say this: I do think that the simple fact that Fruity Loops - a popular D.A.W - launches with a limiter with saturation enabled by default - makes for a really good effect on a lot of music made there. Because already, when you are starting out - you have SOME, little glue affecting your every mixing decision throughout the process and that makes basically whatever you put in there, feel a bit more like MUSIC, from mixing or production move nr. 1. At least regarding production, I'm leaning into wanting to have some processing starting out. But this is still a journey for me.

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Let's continue with a basic "mental image" that you could have to get a feel for this "statue" that might be found in your "rock". Or the song within your empty mixing page.

A basic "rule of thumb" that concludes many points in this book, as a recipe that is good to know about but not to be limited by as "rules you HAVE to follow and adhere to," is that a mix could, with great benefit, have four or five main elements. Or at least four or five "main slots" of frequency that you have to fill up. This is just one possible way to approach it and not the only way.

One main element in the "middle," the LEAD thing.

One LOWEST thing, such as a bass.

Something in the very top, the sizzle, the brightest heights (that often is what makes a mix sound pro, or at least commercially "fitting"—if "the other things are in place underneath it"), just like adding that final salt or lime juice to your pasta carbonara. It's the final edge of sharpness that makes the wholeness seem more exciting. But it is very dependent on what's underneath it. (It's actually the midrange that will make the song/track sound pro more so than the top end sizzle, but that sizzle in the top will be the final "salt" that makes the song "pop" and sound refined, even though it probably is what is underneath that "sizzle" that will be the *actual* refinement.

And just like the food analogy - we could say that food spices and ingredients have, just like sounds - different frequency curves and properties. Salt for example, would of course be the high end - crisp, snappy and bright.

A bit of parmesan cheese - that would also have a bit of highs in it, but not exactly as much as the actual salt, or lime juice. The parmesan would be a bit sweeter in the mids with a little bit more body and "nuttyness".

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A potato would be having very little high end, and stand for a very warm midrange, even with bass in it. And if you had something like melted chocolate - that would contain some of the lower mid frequencies, fat, creamy and also a bit dark. And then a slow-cooked sweet potato would perhaps be and represent the very lowest frequencies and sub range.

And just like in mixing music, we want all the ingredients of the mix be like a good dish - where the individual parts get's to do their job in the wholeness of the mix, but also always be seen as a PART of it all. And if you have a certain amount of bass, then you will because of that find that a certain level of highs will feel good - because it will be heard in comparison to the lows. A mix is a whole always - and all elemens of it are there to make the music as a wholeness be the best it can be. But usually SOME element, or elements will be given a more "important", focal point role in the mix.

How do you tell what elements whould be loudest and what elemens should have more supportive roles? This is usually quite easy to learn just intuitiveley through listening to other people's music that has been made by professional musicians and mixing engineers and prducers. You do not always "think" your way into this too much, but it can come quite natural. Because if will quite frankly just FEEL so good when a lead vocal is just as central as you want it, andwhen that FEELING guides you, then naturally, you'll get a feel for how to then prioritize things in *relationship* to it, based oh how you want that lead thing to keep feeling. If you add more than tree other things to be really loud in the mix for example, you will usually find a "threshold" where it's really hard to maintain that great FEELING whilst adding more loud elements, vs when you keep the most prominent focal point "positioned" elements to a maximum 3 as a rule of thumb, then this effect of a lead element feeling the very best will usually remain and be much much easier to establish.

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To make an actual picture, you could imagine it like this:

Drums, Hard-hitting and very articulated, with some punch in the brightness so that the transients cut through well.

A bass that is lower in pitch than the drums, and the kick drum (which usually is the lowest frequency element of the drum kit) doesn't compete with the bass. So they are already TOGETHER forming a fat-feeling low-end where both bass and the kick can be heard clearly as distinct elements of the mix but also not competing. They together DANCE, they do not fight with one another.

And the bass in that example would be the most booming, low, and subby bass frequency heavy element, vs. the kick drum, would be more snappy and with a bright transient to cut through, and not too much of the very lowest frequencies would be present in the kick drum. So below 50 Hz, for example, it would dip a lot, and even around 100 Hz, it might start to drop out. The kick drum that is.

Then you have a piano or synth pad sound that delivers the main melodic & harmonic background of the music that tells us what key it is in and makes us feel the chords.) Such as a piano underneath the vocals. But this element is actually not placed as a lead element, it is mixed to sit right *underneath*, or *around* the main lead element which would be the vocal. And also the kick drum and snare, but you might not THINK about them as lead elements, but in regards of loudness and volume - they are together with the vocal the hardest hitting, right in-your-face kind of elements.

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The main, center stage element, such as a vocal, is heard very clearly and feels like the main focal point of the song and mix, and the other elements actually "back up" this element. And snare and kick are also really loud but dance with the vocal, and does not compete for space with one another. Rather they compliment one another.

Some very bright shakers that add that "sizzle" on top of everything together with a percussion loop that "backs up" the groove of the shakers but in slightly less super high octaves. The lower parts of the percussion loops is actually placed so that it works together with the piano that also will be in roughly the same range, perhaps with some EQ'ing and also some panning, where the piano might be placed slightly to the left, and the percussion will be placed slightly to the right. (you can listen in mono to make sure that your mix works even when there is no stereo separation available in the play-back system or speakers.) I rarely do this actually but well, it can be a good technique to make sure your mix isn't giving you "false hopes" due to the fact that you have solved separation issues in the mix with panning instead of through EQ'ing or using the faders.

But I'm simply just so focused on the CREATIVE, FELT aspect of music making that such an approach feels a little bit too technical. But I know it exists and it is very good to know how to use. (Because if you solve a separation issue in the mix with panning alone, then when listening on a system that is in mono, or even on a system that has very big distances between the speakers - panning can create a very different feel for YOU in your mixing position - and in that other environment where the listening properties were so different.

So the "rule" to know about is this: Solving separation issues with panning CAN give you a "false" sense of separation.

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But to be honest - my own personal experience is that using panning can also almost be a VALID solution too sometimes, if used mindfully and referenced enough to make sure it actually works on other systems as well. Through panning you can actually get a wider useable frequency range, or should I say that the same frequency range gets some additional extra space in it. Why not use it? You will notice if you make something that sounds muddy or terrible somewhere else, and then you can adjust how much you use this effect, and also, perhaps combine it with cutting frequencies so that your mix doesn't give you that "false hope".

The basic rule though is that separation should NOT be created using panning, but through EQ'ing and fader volume mainly.

This you should learn.

But to give you an additional, complementary perspective - I had for the longest time just plainly "adapted" a train of thought through some dude on youtube that said that you should ONLY pan hard left, or hard right, or dead center and nothing else. (Because this was how mixing desks were built to function really early on and also - and this is probably the real reason - this way you gain much more space in the stereo image where the contrast between centre, left and right is the absoluteley most strong one. The contrast between what is centre, left and right is as big as it possibly can be. This is true. And it can be used to give you the widest sounding mixes, if wideness in itself is the most important thing you want to aim for and go for!

But the moment I had the rebellious little thought to cheat and pan something 20% to the right within a drum groove, after basically years of only panning hard left and right - I was floored.

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I felt like I had locked myself up within a cage for years for almost no good reason. And I even realized that some of my very FIRST beats, made in FL Studio YEARS earlier, had panning in them and it sounded GREAT. Way back then, I knew NOTHING AT ALL about mixing or production basically, in terms of working within a D.A.W atleast, and what goes for that kind of production - and ONLY did whatever I did based on my intuitive feeling.

So I started panning just the way I felt was sounding and feeling right, once again, and man - I was free. So learn the "rules" but always try them. Nothing is really set in stone relating to musicmaking. It's all tools and skillsets to make ART. And ART is judged by what it makes you FEEL. And so many things will probably be genre - defined. Listening to mixing advice from somebody who only mixes hard rock and metal will perhaps give you great insights, but when mixing hip hop or singer/songwriter, some things might be different. (Even though hip hop and hard rock might be a little bit similar mix-wise. So much is genre - dependent. So when you go by feel and not only "following the rules" - that you THINK are the rules - then most things will come intuitively, or naturally.

Let's continue!

In the examples above of that song with the 5 different main elements of a mix, nothing competes with anything else. Each thing has its own very defined frequency range. And so mixing this will be much easier. The elements of this song naturally are separated already. And this natural separation is what we try to achieve when we don't have it there already in the sounds as well. By carving out certain frequencies from, let's say, a piano, we help it so that it doesn't compete with, let's say, the bass or the guitars.

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What you want to get to is getting the FEEL for this. What does it feel and sound like when there is a good separation between the elements in a song? And how does it sound if the elements "clog" up too much space from each other? And learn this as a FEEL while REMEMBERING THAT YOU ARE MAKING MUSIC. So many times, when learning many technical rules, we will forget about the FEEL of the music and go for what you SHOULD DO. We will discuss the separation aspect much more in-depth soon, but we mention it here aswell because in Spatial Placement, we will be very close to the concept of creating separation. These two aspects of a mix kind of bleed into one another. But to not make you confused you can just think of it like this:

If one element in a mix is very bright and up-front, they will naturally "poke out" more than elements that are much more "dark" in sound and mellow. That will be one element of separation happening in that example. And if one sound is drenched in reverb, and one has no reverb at all, we will perceive the reverby sound to be much more spread out in the "room" so to speak than the close one with no reverb - and this aspect can relate to a kind of separation too. We can use both reverb - and in the reverbs the >delay< knob or fader will be what most dramatically makes something feel further away. A reverb with no delay in it can still feel huge and a bit up front, but really, really BIG, and up front.

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But when we increase the *delay* aspect of it, this mimics the time it takes for the sound to bounce off of the walls. So if you dial up the potentiometer in the plugin that says delay on it, this will sound like the sound you have the delay plugin on is in a room where the reverberation happens after a time, and this will make it sound like the sound is further away usually. Or at least that you perceive the reverberations to happen longer after the initial transients which will translate into you feeling like the room is bigger, or should I say *deeper*, and the initial sound played is "smaller". The delay part of the reverb will create a *depth* to the sound spatially, where only the reverb will add more so to the vastness of the feeling, and the size of the "room". And of course playing with the dry/wet pots will blend between the reverb sound in itself and the dry signal, where 20% dry and 80% wet would feel like well... We're swimming.

More on reverberation:

All sounds we ever hear naturally, in real life, are reverberating in a room of some sort, bouncing on things; even outside, there will be things like trees that make the sound bounce back to you. So often reverb is a great way to make music sound more natural to us. But using it on too many elements might make the whole thing on the contrary sound very unnatural, because in real life, we are only hearing things reverberating in the one space we are in. Having three different rooms reverberating to us simultaneously might sound really weird. Not an absolute rule here, definitely not, but just consider this. We generally want all reverb in the same track so for some kind of cohesion, a kind of "blending well". And if reverberation is over-used, we might find ourselves basically arriving at a mix that with perhaps only one sound in it, still eats up basically the whole frequency range. Both frequency wise and also time-wise/depth wise.

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Often reverberation and time effects has a similar need that the need for space in the frequency spectrum has.

Using reverb in too many places can make each reverberating sound feel less natural and good-sounding, and instead the whole thing might sound drenched.

So a quick fix can be to apply it in a quite sparing way, or if one sound has a huge amount of it, then be really mindful of what other sounds have a lot it too.

(And low-cut it—that is a good thing often to go for—because it will make the reverb not hit the lowest frequency ranges and thus clutter up the low frequencies too much.)

(Also high-cutting it can really give space for other things.)

So generally, for the reverb aspect of mixing to come through sounding actually really good, you might want to actually work on the basics of other elements first such as fader balances. Because reverb can be one of these things that - going for the pro mix sound and quality - can be hard to get a feel for early on. Because it has the potential to both make everything sound bigger - but definitely also the opposite actually - cluttered, muddy and washed out. But do not be afraid! You can use the simple "rule" of applying reverb to only one or two sources of sound to get away from a big part of this "problem" - and low cut those reverbs so hat the low-end information in the sounds does not echo as much - because that can easily lead to this earlier mentioned "mud".

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A good frame of mind is to think, starting out, in terms of *depth*, and *width*. So that you will have two images in your mind for how to place things and where. The depth is probably one of the harder aspects of mixing to get good at because there rarely is a very easy way to achieve this. What you want to achieve is creating the feeling that some sounds are *behind* others - so that the whole mix then as it were sounded a bit like you were standing in front of a stage, and the different musicians and their elements in the mix are spread out on that stage, and some here, when we are talking about *depth*, would be placed further back, and some further to the front. Also to the left and right of course but right now considering *depth*, we will be discussing the front--to--back dimension and relationship.

This is achieved often using EQ firstly, because when you make a sound a bit *darker*, then it will be perceived to be further back. And by darker we mean making the sound containing less of the very high up frequencies. The more high-end we have in a sound, usually the more direct and up-front and up-close it feels. So the elements we want to take a back-seat-role - just make them a little bit darker (or a lot) - it depends on the situation. Then in addition to that we can use reverbs to great advantage, especially when we dial in a delay factor on the reverb. And by that I right now refer to the time it takes for the reverb to "hit the walls" - not that we add a delay to the entire reverb then repeating onwards in the sense that we would achieve with a delay plugin. Doing this will usually make something sounding more ambient in a powerful way, even though we might go subtle on the dials on the reverb. Little often does it. Going past 20% of the value on the delay would in most plugins - but not all plugins of course - send us into muddy territory. Because time effects "eat up" the sound spectrum in all directions basically, we often want to use them with a bit of delicacy. As a "rule".

Now learn the rule and then go break it. :)

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When you have gotten a feel for the basic "room", or depth & width "field" - that you have to work with concerning reverb without cluttering the whole mix in a "bad" way - you can just return to focusing on the music - and do whatever. We're just trying to learn the basics, so that we then can be more free. Do not get any rules in your mind that sticks like glue and "has" to be done. If the music feels good - it is good. And the better the music feels - the better the mix is by definition. We know - we say this a million times. But repetition is so key. We would like to hear the music that you could make whenever YOU come out fully, not restricted by any of these "rules" in the sense that they would hinder any great idea. We teach you the "rules" so that you can learn them, achieve all that's possible when you grip these fundamentals, but then remember that we are making art.

Two little tips on reverberation:

Putting one reverb on the whole mix can make it feel like the music is all happening in the same room. But this can also sometimes REALLY CLUTTER UP THE MIX, so this will often be a little bit of a "dangerous" thing to go for, but in some genres, like, for example, a singer-songwriter song with vocals, guitar, cajon, and shakers, it can be really good sounding and not be dangerous at all.

It depends on the situation, but this is a thing you can go for sometimes.

Also get both a convolution reverb and an algorithmic one.

A convolution reverb is where they have recorded an actual room and make your sound go through a really realistic-sounding reverberation-creation process.

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This can sometimes even almost be a necessity for percussive things such as congas or bongos or snares because an algorithmic reverb (with the upside of it taking much, much less computing power) basically is a super-fast delay unit that "copies" the sound many times and plays it incredibly fast—this can then result in a really snappy percussive sound sounding "clicky," like you get a rattling sound almost, instead of a smooth tail of lush reverb that sounds real. Algorithmic reverbs might sound like "marbles" bouncing really fast instead of an echo of a natural sound, if the initial sound is really snappy and short like for example a snare or a snap of the fingers.

And third tip:

Definitely get the other different versions of reverbs. A spring reverb, like in guitar amps; a hall reverb—good for many things to sound big and naturally emotional; and a plate reverb—just well, great, often on vocals, and has shaped much of our collective musical sound taste.

And by all means - different reverb plugins simply sound quite different. It's nice to find those gems of plugin that you find matches your taste and demand for quality and often simply sounds amazing to me that you just slap them on a track. We will share some recommendations later that are simply some items that WE have liked and loved.

But these are so many great plugins out there, and most plugin subscription packs have some really great plugins in them. Like top class ones.

Both things are true: A 15 year old could make

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Now it's time to get into something really juicy. That also ties in with the reverberation and time effect aspect of mixing and music making. This next chapter will probably be something that you will work on for a long time, something that just gets better and better with time. And it will perhaps be the second most important thing for reaching a "pro" mix sound right after fader balances. But be wary! A pro mix sound is both a "thing" in and of itself but at the same time it's really basically never detached from the MUSIC. And if we are speaking MUSIC, then the next chapter would of course basically blend in in importance with the other chapters as well. But "pureley" mix-speaking - this is probably the single most important thing to get good at and get a great feel for, right after fader balances!



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Separation.

This is achieved by making sure the elements in the mix have their own space, where they can be heard without other elements of the mix concealing them, or parts of them too much. If one element has a "clear" spot frequency-wise, like a slot where nothing else is, then that element we are trying to make audible and sound good in the mix can really come to its full purpose. We achieve this effect by carving out some frequencies (such as using a low-cut filter on a kick drum for example) to, for example, make more space for the bass guitar underneath it.

We also achieve this by picking sounds and instruments and effects that already exist at a certain frequency range and pairing them up with other elements that exist NATURALLY in OTHER frequency ranges. For example, if we already have a really subby bass going for us, then we usually do not add any other sound or bass that occupies EXACTLY the same frequency range too much and go for things that naturally "hang out" in different areas frequency-wise. Elements that would be a bit brighter than the sub-bass. Or if we pick something else that goes really low frequency-wise - then we usually would carve out the very lowest frequencies from the very subbiest bass so that the new element we try to add doesn't conceal it too much.

And just to throw it in here. Whatever you are doing regarding this will be passing through your speaker/listening system. The more accurately representing the "real" sound that the mix actually gives out - the more easily you will be able to judge these things. (We have a chapter further in that goes a little bit deeper into this and gives more perspective on it.)

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If your listening system isn't very flat, for example, then knowing exactly how much to carve out - especially in the lows - will be as hard as the listening system is "off".

Let's move on!

A piano, for example, might hang out very close to a vocal or some guitars, and therefore we might want to carve out just a little (or more, depending on the situation) of the frequencies most prevalent in that vocal OUT of the piano so that there is a bigger space and "room" for the vocal to exist in without other elements clogging up that frequency range. However this phenomenon will usually get stronger the lower we go frequency-wise because the lower we go - the less "space" we have in the sound field because of the density down there. The sound waves are so long when we go down that low, that fewer waves have room to fit in close to each other. Higher up on the frequency spectrum many more oscillations ("waves" of sound can fit together because the soundwaves up there are much, much shorter.)

Moving on with an example - a sub bass, a bright & punchy kick drum that isn't too boomy and bassy, more like a snappy funk kick, for example, a vocal, and some really bright shakers would naturally all fall into a mix quite easily, probably because they all NATURALLY occupy very different parts of the frequency spectrum.

If your task was to mix a hundred guitars, for example, it will probably not be very long until you find yourself having a clogged-up mix. If you, however, mix a symphonic orchestra with 100 different instruments, then they will already have been designed to occupy different frequency ranges and thus naturally give you a much easier time dividing the different instruments into their own little slots within the frequency spectrum.

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A good exercise for learning about separation in a mix is to start with the bass frequencies, the low end, and learn from there. Because the bass is the "cloggiest" frequency range. And this will usually be a HUGE "jump" in "pro-ness" of your mix when you get a feel for this and "get it right."

And just to clarify what we discussed above: Giving each instrument their own "little space" doesn't necessarily mean that they ONLY get to have soundwaves being heard in a tiny little area, and you cut everything below and above - but that we at least make them sound a BIT less loud in certain other frequency areas. Carving out just a little bit out of the highs for example using a high shelf filter - removing highs all the way from the top and as far down as you choose - can be a very effective way to make the sound sit "further back" for example, and allow other instruments and elements within your mix to occupy that more frontal space. And what we tried to convey here is that you do not have to cut EVERYTHING out of the highs to allow another element to have space up there, you can by ear just carve out as much as feels right using the "sweep with feeling" methodology that we discussed earlier in the book. You could apply the high shelf filter/EQ - and then just listen to the other element that you want to give space to, and sweep up and down until you feel like both elements within the mix gain their rightful place. It's all about feeling here.

Rule of thumb that can be great to consider when mixing low elements: Only one element can be the LOWEST.

ONE.

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The bass frequencies are so "slow" and "long" that they take up much more space than the other frequencies. So that around for example, 50 Hz, which is usually a space where the bass guitar or synth bass will be strongest at, and the 20 Hz-50 Hz part of a bass guitar, for example, will be the lowest part of it basically. (It can have lower frequencies too, but human ears do not hear much under 20 Hz; however, it can be felt and perceived as a feeling, like a bodily thing rather than something you pick up through the ears. This sub-range around 20 Hz-50 Hz is kind of the "stomach of it." Lower than 50 Hz will be what vibrates the floor and makes your whole body vibrate. Like a giant stepped in and turned on his enormous beard trimmer. And you basically started vibrating along with the entire room. Not the bright, high-pitched vibrations, but literally so low that it goes through all the walls and everything.

And hey, again, these things are to be "learned" as a FEEL, not just technical knowledge like facts. 20 Hz will be like the very room you are in is shaking, buzzing actually; it cuts through everything; it goes straight through furniture and walls even. Like the lowest possible rumble you could hear, so low that it almost starts to drop out of your hearing.

Well, it actually does eventually. Sound will drop out of our human hearing spectrum but still, it can be felt like a quality, like a physical, subtle often (since most speakers cannot really replicate soundwaves that low very well) feeling.

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But this low range can be a little bit "dangerous" to work with - especially if you have much information down there in your sonics. Because it will not really be *heard* that much, but there will be a cluttered feeling that can come from it, if you have too much happening down there. - Even if it's basically at the very end of the capacity of your speakers or headphones. So the general rule would be to cut away everything down there on most instruments. Even if it's often just barely noticeable, sometimes almost not at all, let's say on a recording of shakers on your track - it can be good to cut everything below like 20 HZ anyways, because added up with every other instrument that also might have some slight bit of information down there, together it will build up. And you will end up with a mix that might feel like it's hard to pin-point what is up with it, but something in the low-end just feels like a mess, a bit unclear. But really subtle. Like you cannot say what it is, it just doesn't sound clear and tight down here. Cutting your brighter instruments such as guitars, shakers, pianos and vocals and so on so that the very lowest, sub-frequencies are taken away from them - can really free up that feeling in the lows. And there is then a completely open "spot" or "stage" down there for the VERY LOWEST element to exist in.

And so again, the general rule is to actually only ever have ONE, single element that gets to take up that *very lowest* spectrum of your frequency curve. Around 20Hz - 50Hz.

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50 Hz is a bit higher up in "rumble" than 20 Hz and feels like a really OOMPHY "JUICE" that "thumps" in your stomach. 100 Hz is where the dance track really BOUNCES and the bassline makes you cry tears of happiness; it's really bassy but high up enough for the bass frequencies to feel a bit more "musical" rather than "physical." But it also starts to become "denser" in the feeling, and "thicker". Instead of a "rumble" from "the depths" - that 20Hz-30Hz might feel like - around 100Hz the soundwaves will carry more of a "pressing & pushing" quality. It gains more "body" you might say. But these workds can be hard to understand possibly, so just learn this by doing. Slap an EQ on a bass sound for example, grab one of the "things you move" in it, and MOVE IT. Seewhat happens when you move a boost in volume to the various frequency ranges. And see what you LIKE. Wheredo you LIKE to boost the bass for example naturally, and where it starts to sound too "boomy". That's a good word for what can happen around 100-200 Hz. We WANT enough "boominess" because without it you might have a sound that sounds very fragile, and weak, no-powerful. But too much - and it starts to feel like a badly kept timing in a conversation. Like one dude just talks so loud that it gets weirdly uncomfortable. (Weird analogy) but I'm just trying to paint a picture for you. If you however just try it out you'll FEEL it, and *feel it* with greater nuances and experience as time goes by. A really boomy bass might clutter up the mix so that basically nothing else can be heard niceley. But the RIGHT amount of "boominess" will be nessecary for some amount of power to be fet also. It's... MIXING. The word actually describes very well what we are to be doing.

1000 Hz means 1000 oscillations per second. 20 Hz means 20 oscillations per second.

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A great bass sound will usually, of course, have all of these frequencies in the same sound; some around the super-subby regions, and some in the 100Hz range, and also some information all the way up to above 10kHz. I'm just trying to paint the picture here of everything so you can get an idea of each sound frequency spectrum as a little world of its own.) You will get a feel for all of this as you go. And there is no need to basically ever think in terms of numbers **FIRSTLY**.

All you need is the feeling of the sounds. The numbers can be a great way to "peek into" where to start. And then be a general understanding of where to go with the EQ for example, in different situations. But this will all come naturally and intuitiveley - the more you learn by **DOING IT**.

I rareley think like, basically ever, hmm this must be a 6k HZ problem. Well I think "Yeah this must be a 6k thing" - but the moment I open up the EQ, that's just only the **STARTING POINT** where I'm going first to look. After that initial click in the plugin, it's all feeling. I think you will be by definition having better chances and odds of becomming a really great mixer if you simply approach it from this felt way. And reference with the music you **LOVE**.

The more you repeat the process of listening to what you love, remember it and get a feel for how much of each frequency band basically, there is in those songs - then you will start to be able to not have to think basically at all.

The feeling you can get when you turn up your own music **LOUD** in a fat soundsystem / stereo somewhere else (and perhaps with other people around) - and you actually feel that "Whow... It really did, finally start to sound professional..." - That... Is a great feeling. And by "professional" we really just mean that the music comes through as well as in professional mixes. And what constitutes those we have already discussed quite a bit in this book.

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It will generally mean that you have elements within your mix that all sound well TOGETHER, but also that they shine by themselves, at least in the manner that they do not clog up space over each other. You can literally get these eargasm/earcandy moments where the mix just sounds so clean, crisp and beautiful - even though it might be a song that leans towards the harder side like EDM or Rock or Hip Hop or something like that. There is a special kind of relaxing feeling when a mix does not have too many elements that clog up the space that the other elements want to be in. It's almost like a science - almost technical. When each element sounds clearly and "unmasked" by other elements, while also sounding nice in themselves but also serves their purpose in the grander scheme of the whole mix - that is just pleasing to the ears. It can feel like turning off a fan after cooking - comparing a mix that is cluttered and where elements mask each other - and a mix that is free of such clogging and "masking". But this is a general "rule".

Learning this thing about separation is a matter of trial and error, of repetition and of slowly enhancing your skillset in mixing, that is a whole, but consists of all these smaller, individual aspects.

And referencing - we will really mention here that listening to professional mixes in YOUR mixing system and YOUR exact listening position will teach you a lot about this. Over time. This is a great thing to learn from.

And even now, we are zooming in on MIXING, which is a smaller aspect of MUSIC-MAKING.

Do you see what we mean? It's all connected - and for every little slice of the "pie" you learn more about, your proficiency in the wholeness becomes greater.

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What will be going on inside you will probably be much more like a felt experience of carving out the MUSIC, whilst the thoughts are like a stream of little comments and statements that are like an undercurrent. They are not in the center that much at all. You are focused on the music, and how to get it out. This will be like second nature to you. So we learn the rules so that we can get skilled, but then when we have learned the "rules", we can become able to be the kind of mixers and producers who then can know when to use them and when not to and their not needed. The rules then, no longer "rule" - because we know them - but are not limited by them. So read about all the "rules" of this book in this way and manner. Learn them to be able to get free of them eventually, aswell. Or rather than "free of them" - we should say - be able to forget about them and focus totally on the music - get zoned in on the FEELING of the music.

Your FEEL for the music is what people will contract you for. What the listener or customer feels for the MUSIC in your mix, that your mix brings OUT - is what our "profession" IS.

It's the whole target, the whole goal, the whole point.

And just remembering this one little "thing" might in itself make you a better mixer than many.

We are working with MUSIC.

Not frequencies and numbers.

(But we need to learn just a little - or a lot - about those to GET TO THE best possible music that you can make.

(MUSIC.) <---

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(You will perhaps hit a point where you just kind of let the love for the music carry you on, and that might be the majority of the "pull" on you. Through that love for the music we can find ourselves improving continuously, but it starts to happen by itself basically. That's how it can feel when we are not only chasing a point somewhere in the future, but dig into the groovy nature of the moment where both the future dreams can exist but also just be so much about the place we are in NOW. Because we just continue doing, and then our experience deepens whilst we are just basically having fun with the music.) That is something that I think many would enjoy. Learning not only by doing, but through PLAYING. It's fun. It's all free. And we get to headbang half-the way. To where? It doesn't matter *all that much* because the moment is feeling so good that both the destination and the journey become like one. Each next new, improved step gives us dopamine and makes us smile, and that knowing, that we are getting closer and closer, further and further just feels like well... Dopamine. We are kind of programmed to strive for rewards I feel like. And I think it's good to have something like this in your life. Something that grows, something that makes you feel like you are going somewhere - and that also can translate even to showing people beautiful things, making money perhaps and spreading some kind of energy into the world that you enjoy and think is good.

The amount of doors that have opened for me because of the music I have done, I do not even think I myself have realized the impact of. So many moments, so much mutual enjoyment - so many wonderful friendships and conversations - so many invitations to cool things and places... Having a simple (and nice) song that you can show people can do more than you might think - if it turns out to happen to move them - the other people - in a way that makes *them feel really good*.

And to get others to feel really good, well... continue reading our materials.

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I really do believe that music can - almost just by it's own nature - change more in our lives than so many other things can. You can just pretend that you are listening to a loud, amazing song and you might feel different. Now you put on the headphones and press play and crank it. Now you feel like a different, boosted person - that is really almost like magic.

Okay let's get back to the separation within a mix. (Otherwise we might be going down a rabbithole that turns into a book by itself. - Another time.)

We were now talking about how to get the LOWEST frequencies sounding really good in your tracks. And that will often be something you want when you are trying to make a HIT-VIBE song. That can get people dancing and cheering for you and your song. Try only having ONE element of your mix be the LOWEST and see how much more professional your mix sounds. (Achieved, for example, by carving out the absolutely lowest frequencies from your kick drum so that it sits "over" the bass guitar if the bass guitar is the lowest element of your mix.) And you can simply play them and put a low-cut filter on the kick drum and sweep it upwards until you feel like the bass guitar and the bass become "friends," instead of "BOOMING" together, competing for the same space. (Note: It is always MUSIC we are making, good friends, which will mean when the elements we are talking about here, the kick and the bass drum, feel the best together and sound clean, clear, and professional. Even if it's a really distorted sound we are going for, for example. And so then, you can through this exercise learn how to start becoming more adept at sound separation within your mixes.

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The same can go for the piano, for example. You probably will be able to "sweep" with a low-cut filter until the low end of the piano doesn't "compete" with the bass guitar in the same way. This thing really goes with pianos I feel like because pianos have a really wide frequency spectrum often. And especiall if the player has used the lower octaves on the piano. In that case the piano will be located frequency wise in the same range as the bass basically, and also probably be competing for space with the kick drum aswell. So knowing this about the piano can be a game-changer so that you always get good mixes even when pianos with really wide and deep frequency information is present. Pianos love low-cut. In mixes atleast. It's just one of those things. :) Yup!

This "listening and "sweeping" until you feel like the "click" happens is probably the most central thing I would want to teach you regarding mixing. It goes for the fader balances, it goes for tuning in any sound basically, and it goes for creating separation in the mix. And this might sound like a simple principle, and it is, but it might be overlooked sometimes, I think, when we try to learn mixing.

THE KEY IS HOW YOU SWEEP.

DO YOU LOOK FOR THE MUSIC, OR DO YOU LOOK FOR FOLLOWING A RULE?

We want to know the "rules" but always look for the music. The music might TOTALLY break the rules; we never know. And so remember this.

We are making MUSIC when we are mixing.

This might be the most forgotten thing in some mixing communities.

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We might get so technical that we forget what we are working with.

But this is what any REALLY GREAT mixer knows through and through. These people are BOTH technically savvy and proficient—skilled—but also always remember that their whole job is making MUSIC to be what? The best...

MUSIC it can be.

And that will largely, basically, only be able to be judged by how good you feel when you listen to it. And a great mix wouldn't be judged to be a great mix if what it did wasn't to make the music feel the best it possibly can.

There will however be a slight call to be made for most mixes. Sometimes there will, even though you might feel like going a certain way with it, simply be a tradeoff there to consider. Sometimes you just want the music to be right up in there with the commercial hit vibe songs. And those almost always have a "certain sound", a certain frequency curve response. And so then, you might find that for example even the slightly almost "overdone" excitement or saturation / compression of a mix might be the thing you end up picking to go for, because that just makes the music "click" also, but in another, certain way.

Sometimes what we want to achieve might be to give the music a certain vibe, based on different factors and reasons. And that might be then done by making mixing calls that are a kind of blend between personal taste and genre—specific thematics. So it's all about the specific song and the purpose of it. If you want to press play on your song / track right after some of the most popular contemporary songs - then you might take for example the general level of excitement / saturation / compression into account.

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So you will be blending YOUR TASTE, with what is a "standard" within a certain genre, or tradition.

It's great to know HOW to make an exact replica of contemporary, commercial music sound wise. But then to also be able to make YOUR version of it, with YOUR taste. Like a master chef might do his / her interpretation of a very standard dish. So by all means learn to "cook a good fish n' chips" mixing wise, but remember to have fun, and bring out your own taste aswell.

It is your taste actually, that will be what uniquely identifies you as a mixer. Most people can learn the rules eventually with som hard work (or just continous play - I'm serious) but what ultimateley will make people say "Man, I want this guy on the mix for my track" - Will probably be the emotions the guy hiring you got when listening to your other works.

And that is not ever just a technical thing. That is BOTH technical AND, a matter of TASTE. Do not underestimate either, the power something new can have. The thing is just that people often gravitate towards what they have already grown accustomed to and already like. But the funny thing about that is that is always changes, ever so slowly. And if something new should "break out" in the field of collective music taste and enjoyment, then that will become a new norm, in a sub-genre or very widely even. So what do I want to say with this?

Not really any advice here, but just one perspective.

When YOU are paving up a way that few have went down before you, the FEELING will probably be very different. Because there will be much fewer "roadmarks" along that way / path. Fewer roadmarks that gives you an intuitive feeling that "people will love this".

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Because perhaps, nobody basically at that particular moment in time, KNOWS that they in fact, would love it.

So what I'm saying with this is that if you would tread down such a path - whatever it may be like, it will be very likely to FEEL different.

But if you believe in your style, sound and vibe - I would say go for it. Even though you might not be right at the centre of what people are right now accustomed to.

I would say this: Genuine music with genuine FEEL, will always have a place. No matter basically of what the "masses" right now are vouching for.

But it can be very nice to know both to believe in your unique style and music - whilst also being proficient in the "styles and languages" of music genres that people already are digging to.

Because it will basically all come down to your dream and your purpose with your musical journey. And those things will be quite different for everybody, basically. What we at Spark The Music want to do is empower YOU, whatever vision you might have.

Somebody might want to just be able to mix in such a way that when their own track is played after a big HIT song, then people will go "WHOW... Is that you? That sounded just as good as the HIT song... Dang!!!"

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Somebody else might be the lone wolf that alone, might give rise to a genre that brings back folk-tunes from days of old, in an "old" way, or in a completely new way. And this latter person and musician might be then like a "spearhead", paving the way basically completely alone, if you compare his / her path with somebody who wants to make super-commercial HIT vibe songs. (I think of the HIT concept simply as really catchy and universally appealing, the music literally HITS you - but you know what I mean.)

If you would identify more with the latter guy I was describing, then the insights we would like to pass on is this:

Get accustomed to a bit more of a "grind" in terms of your path in showing your music to people and getting positive feedback. You might be trying to do the equivalent to growing a plant that is from another climate, in soil where other plants grow much more easily. If this is you - then we want to pep you into enduring this. And this has actually often been the way everything in musical, widespread taste has started to form. A lonely pioneer, and then much later, the huge masses catches on. So we want to both give a roadmap for the pioneers as well as everybody very far from that archetype, and everybody in between. It's all uniquely special for YOU. Your path will not exactly look like anybody else's. But sometimes there can be a lot in common too. But - the core concept and thing would be this: YOU must basically know what you ACTUALLY WANT. If what you actually want is to make music that you LOVE - and also that gets other people on a consistent basis digging YOUR MUSIC - then you might want to tread a "middle ground path" - where a HIT VIBE is not a bad thing in your mind, a something more progressive, traditional maybe - or experimental even - is also encouraged. I would personally say that it's really simple. The better you feel when listening to a piece of music - the better it is. That is all you need to know basically. All other "considerations" are just blabber, dry-talk and perhaps trying to fit into boxes.

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What however is NEEDED basically, for just about anybody - is that whatever "type of path" you are treading and walking - you can only make people hear your music if they have a place to listen to it. So get to any version of something releasable. It's up to you to decide how much time you want to spend with each thing, but at the end of the day - let people have a WAY to be able to enjoy your music. If nothing ever basically gets released - then now people well... How can they hear it?

GET SOMETHING FINISHED! Eventually. GET IT DONE ENOUGH TO CLICK UPLOAD!

So yeah, we are blissfully ranting about the many dimensions of one of the branches on the tree of music-making. The branch called something like: The unique path relating to external responses to your own music. Wasn't it fun?

Now let's get back to the mixing again with more talk on the general things about it that can lead you to making the best music of your whole life:

Whatever technical "rules" we go for applying are there to make the MUSIC be the best it can be. So this book will both remind us of this quite a lot throughout—but ALSO TEACH THESE "RULES."

We will actually summarize a whole "list" of these general rules later in the book, you can go to page so and so to read about them if you want!

These "rules" are good to know because they are when known and used while looking for the MUSIC to be the best, and the rules are just tools to make that music come alive, able to get us to enter into the land of the pro-mixes.

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You might look back after having mixed a while and realize that things you might have done - right as you were starting out - might actually have some really great qualities that actually got WORSE as you learned all these technical things.

Because if you knew nothing about technical things at ALL, you might just, well, MIX THE WAY THAT MAKES YOU FEEL THE BEST THAT YOU CAN MANAGE. If you, however, get too much into your head with rules, you might aim for RULES rather than what makes *you feel the best*.

(This chapter, and the part about creating separation in the low end can be such a dimension of mixing and producing, actually.)

Sometimes you might find that after you started carving out lows from your song, the whole power and impact just vanished. And you mute your EQs after having worked with carving out things for an hour, and BANG, BAM, BAM, now everything feels SO MUCH BETTER again. Even though you might be back at a bit of a muddy, cluttered mix.

This can have to do with losing perspective too, but often it's simply making mixing moves that you just do because you think you SHOULD do those things, and you forget to listen, with your FEELING, to the what? The MUSIC!

(lol)

And one thing that could potentially contribute to this happening can also be the quality of your listening system - and that really does include your room - probably a lot more so than your speakers actually. If you have a decently accurate listening environment you will be able to- all across the board make much better mixing decisions.

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And if you sit so long with a track that you forget that initial perspective that comes naturally when you've had a bit of a break, you can sometimes lose a bit of sense of "reality." As well as "ear fatigue" can happen - a phenomenon where you have listened for so long to our sounds that your ears actually start to "dampen" all sounds that you hear - especially the highs. And so you will actually basically hear another mix, than the one your speakers are outputting.

And sometimes, then, for these various reasons perhaps - then going back to the beginning might actually sound better than the version you got from the changes you did. So *speed* is essential to build up through learning your process and having the experience of making something, listening in other environments and making the connection between the mixing calls you made, and the results you got later, on other systems for listening. (But this can of course also be done a bit really close by. You do not always have to necessarily run to your car to check your mixes even though that can be really fun. You can for example have a little >shitty< bluetooth speaker nearby that allows you to check your mix without having to move much. And as soon as you start to make SOME connections between what you mix in YOUR SYSTEM and LISTENING POSITION, and how it then generally sounds in other systems everywhere else, that is when that process really can speed up. We need ONE solid point of reference that doesn't change much. If listening environments constantly change, something like that, then it can be a real mess to understand what mixing moves gives what results. But do not stress. It can all be just so fun to do. Keep it fun!

Okay, next chapter!

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Contrast.

Contrast makes for, basically, *perspective*. And how we *perceive* things. Even a song that goes from a simple vocal and a single extra backup guitar into the same thing but with a huge kick drum added to the vocal and the guitar might sound even like a HARDER impact than if you were to go from 10 of the most brutally powerful guitars into 15 brutally powerful guitars. The step in the first example will "percentually" increase more in "power" than if you add onto something that already operates at 110% force.

Use this to your own advantage. Before the hardest drop, for example, you might want to add a short, completely silent pause because in that example, you will then, when the big hit kicks in at for example a chorus, then the INCREASE in power will go from basically 0 to 10 instead of from 7 to 10.

Another way to do this will perhaps be to carve out the entire frequency range in your track just before the drop happens, and release those plugin that made the whole mix sound a bit more like a old radio, EXACTLY when the chorus hits. (This "old radio" effect can easily be achieved by carving out both the lows and the highs aswell, so that the entire mix goes through a "filter" that only let's through a narrow spectrum of the mids. Listen to "numb" fo example by Linkin Park. That intro into the chorus is just one of those hall-mark examles of using that "narrow - into - huge" tricks.

These CONTRASTS will make whatever comes "after" sound MUCH BIGGER AND MORE POWERFUL simply because of what came BEFORE IT. And in the same way, you can go from really loud to really quiet to make a super impactful, really awesomely powerful transition, simply due to the fact that the two parts are so different in dynamics from one another!

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So let's say you want your chorus to sound amazingly big; then do not only consider HOW BIG the chorus is, but HOW BIG OF A DIFFERENCE it is compared to what comes right before it. And intuitively you might think that to make the hardest-hitting song, with the most perceived power, you would mix every element in that song to be huge and really loud. But in fact, very often you will reach a stronger perceived "hardness" and power from prioritizing a few elements that, in CONTRAST to OTHER elements in the song, are really loud.

(Pro tip)—contrary to what you might think, fewer elements in a song can often sound much bigger than if you had tons of elements at the same time. Because in the case where we have fewer elements active, then EACH ELEMENT can be mixed much bigger, deeper, and wider because we simply have more available space there in the frequency spectrum.

(If you've ever recorded drums and listened to them by themselves while playing with a compressor (and cranking it) on them... You will know what I mean. Every time I've done that, I have basically felt like, Man... Can't this be the whole song? It just sounds so frickin' powerful...

You basically hit MAX perceived awesomeness in terms of how powerful something can sound right there.

A solo drumkit with a lot of compression.

As soon as other things enter, it becomes harder and harder to make each element sound EXTREMELY powerful.

But bear in mind always that how big a sound feels will not only be because of what the sound is but will come from the fact of what has been playing before it or together with it.

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If you have the biggest-sounding drumkit on your mix bus, for example, and then just add one little element to it, like a cowbell (lol), but that cowbell you make louder than the drumkit, now your drums won't sound as big anymore; they will actually sound smaller because something else is louder.

Some of the biggest-sounding songs actually have the fewest elements in them. Seven Nation Army, for example. No bass in there, just guitars, drums, and a vocal basically. And it has the fattest, most powerful rock-essence-feeling imaginable, basically.

Too many elements might actually make the whole thing more of a challenge to have sound huge because it will be like you can't see the forest because of all the trees. So many things are there that nothing pops out very much.

But if you go from basically complete silence into just a single drumkit together with your vocal, then you will very easily be able to make that new part with the drumkit added sound HUGE.

And yeah... Fader balances here. Can. Do. ALOT. Simple, actual volume. Is. Powerful when we go from something quieter - into something louder.

Okay, that was about CONTRAST in a mix!

And for this, again: Do not underestimate how much of it will be faders. Simple volume. How loud is the verse leading up to the silent break that goes into the chorus? Faders. Your most powerful tool.

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But to finish off, since we are speaking of contrast in mixing—and thus having the natural conversation of how to make things sound huge and have a big impact—compressors & saturation do come in here too. Because when we want a powerful sound, when the whole mix is squeezed together a bit, or quite a lot, then it feels like the sounds are squished against a windshield, and they all want to just press on out. The compression makes it feel like the sounds are just that—compressed. Squeezed. And that has a powerful connotation. It's literally *so much* trying to *get through* that bits and pieces of it get smashed together. That effect in itself contributes to powerful feelings often.

One little interesting thing here will have to do with the space of frequency you have in your part if the song. Let's say it's a verse.

For rock and Hip Hop music, a funny thing is often that to get the most powerfully felt moments and passages, generally on verses you might want to actually have basically NO low end. A hard Hip Hop Beat with just drums and let's say a single flute, might bring about a much "harder" feel, than in the case that you also had a bass in there, it's often like that anyways. And also for rock music I have found this. Removing the bass completely might give the track a flowy, edgy and "hard" vibe. Vs. Adding a bass sometimes actually "fills" it out in a way that can sometimes feel like the "powerlevel" actually decreases. This might be a bit hard to convey with words, so just try it out if you feel like it. Make a Hip Hop beat with only drums and some single melodic melody or sample, or a rock song with only drums and perhaps a guitar "stab" here and there, quite sparingly coming in with big spaces inbetween the "stabs" and see the effect. Sometimes that gives the whole vibe a kind of "dry" quality that translates to a hard, powerful feeling, Vs. a more filled out frequency spectrum might create a more full, harmoniously "mild" quality. Not always applicable but can be worthwhile to try out!

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There is also a way of helping yourself write the next part of your song that you can use almost like a "hack", let's say if you have gotten a bit stuck. (Or you can use it deliberately because it gives you an interesting perspective. If you have a certain Chorus let's say, and you are trying to figure out a verse part that matches it and gives you an interesting song, you can simply make the total contrast happen, to the Chorus.

And you can do this by writing down three words for the Chorus and then just reverse those words.

For example if the words you picked for the Chorus was Loud, Big and Fast, then your verse might be made to be Small, Quiet and Slow. It's a funny thought but it can really lead to some great song-writing!

Now let's move on to:



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Sound Choices.

This point is one of those things that can make you really have an easy time mixing, - or a harder time mixing. (Even though most things CAN be done, it can definitely be very easy when the raw ingredients we are working with naturally fit together from scratch.)

And so having some skill and knowledge of what instruments occupy different various parts of the frequency spectrum, but also, sometimes you can just be "dealt a great, a really nice hand" by having good sounds and sound packs to work with starting out.

I would personally recommend you not leaning too much in either direction:

- Being super dependent on great sounds and buying a lot of plugins and sounds all the time but not learning the basics of mixing thoroughly.
- Being almost obsessively in the mindset of "no new plugins or sounds are needed; all you need is a great knowledge of the craft and techniques—only stock plugins are needed to get the job done."

I would say explore BOTH, but be aware of what your tendency is. Firmaments of mixing would be super good to know for most people.

Work WITH your strengths, but also just add a tiny bit of practice to your other side.

Without being good at the basics of mixing, you will probably never be able to reach as high as you want and make as good mixes as those you dream about.

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Great fader balances and frequently cuts in standard plugin material will sound better than poor fader balances and cuts in great sounding samples and plugins.

And to the argument of the other side also: if you think that no new plugins can make a huge difference, well... you must actually not have heard many plugins. (Or just bad ones... lol) Some plugins are literally like, "Press a button and BAM..."

"Wow, "this saved me an hour of tweaking, and this is probably even better too."

(We will list some of these further down if you are interested in collecting some really great-sounding tools. - Not paid collaborations but just things we have liked!)

Some people might spend thousands on new plugins and sounds all the time and still not get much further with their music.

Some people online might give advice that talks against getting new plugins. It's all a balance!

What you want to know is this:

Great mixing and know-how will elevate your music to what it *can be*. But it is a yin-yang relationship.

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There is also a FEEL side to it (inspiration and taste) to mixing and making music that is just as important as the FORM side (technical skill and knowledge)—and the FEEL side is probably actually even just a bit more important. But both are needed to ever reach the highest potentials of what your music can be.

A really strongly felt performance of a really frickin great song will move people to tears even if the mix basically sucks. It can be a phone recording with no processing whatsoever, filmed from a distance. No technical knowledge might be needed at all there to make the MUSIC FEEL GREAT.

Vs. a "bad" song performed with basically no feeling could get a platinum producer on it and still remain something that few people would feel anything for.

So what pops out then is that we want both of these yin and yang aspects in our arsenal.

(And they boost each other.)

If you have great technical skill, you might feel enabled to actually know how to get some things out of you that you otherwise wouldn't know how to because you didn't have the technical skill.

If you have a great feel for music, then that alone might be what propels you to achieve greater technical skill because you just want to GET THERE so frickin bad, getting to get the sounds that you hear internally, within you, OUT into the world for everybody to hear.

And usually we lean more to one of these aspects than the other; everybody is different.

Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

Some people might be great, hardworking, persevering people who might be able to spend months on a single song, really meticulously crafting it to be the best it can be, rewriting and reiterating it over and over until it is good enough for their super high standards. But perhaps then realize that for 6 months of work, they now have one song out that 1000 people have heard on Spotify. And then it stops ticking in streams. Or even "worse" - that you have spend so long on it that you have basically completely forgot that initial, natural feeling and perspective on it. You might be so deeply into the mixing for example, that you actually do not any more realize what the song actually is and feels like, kind of. And so you might arrive at an over-produced thing that is "out of sync" with what you basically would feel for it, if you heard it for the first time, with no pre-concieved ideas.

Somebody else might have 1001 songs on their hard drive that all took 30 minutes to write; they are basically ALL AMAZING, but few ever got finished and released.

We usually need a bit of both of these qualities. And we normally are stronger at one of these two aspects.

BUT, in the end, you can just ask yourself this question:

What would my dream reality be concerning my music making?

Where do I actually want to go with it?

If the answer is something inlike: I want to have many people hear it, tour, have millions of streams, and live on it, or something along those lines, then one thing stands out.

There is no way to get there, basically, if people can't HEAR your music.

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So GETTING IT OUT THERE, GETTING IT RELEASED, is basically kind of a MUST.

And then, we come to process, if you ask me. (Which will be a chapter in itself. - This book wanders in and out like a long day-dream about musicmaking - and I think it will actually make you learn more here than if we just stated facts & rules. I hope so at least!)

Asking yourself about what process would GET YOU RELEASED SONGS.

Is it 10 minutes every single day, day in and day out?

Is it full weekends with 3 hours of sleep and noodles and a deadline, or else you cannot eat for the week as a self-made penalty? And you have to spank yourself until you bleed?

Deadlines can be something you can put up to GET SONGS RELEASED.

They can be a great tool to get you really productive, especially if you are a kind of overthinker, a person that starts new things all the time and so on but rarely releases anything.

OR. The other way around.

Somebody might feel like, well, I spend months on a single song, and then not much happens anyway.

What's up here?

This person might want to find a FASTER FORMAT (perhaps of course—these are just possible scenarios) of what could be the case.

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The latter person might want to boost his yin side a little bit more and instead let go a bit, feel more, try things that are inspiring, and make up some games. Or reframe a new process, also like a game.

Reframing the process, or goal might be key to make the over-thinker loosen up. For example: It could be something like this:

Instead of the game looking like (mentally): Let's see how amazing or shitty I am as a person based on how others are going to judge me now for releasing this song - It could look like this in a re-framing:

What would "Charlie makes a one hour creation of going from a verse feel into a drop-chorus-house-hit-feel and clocking it. And the goal is not to hit Spotify even, but to release it on an anonymous, "under-cover" profile somewhere.

Would that feel more free? Re-framing the process and goal could be a way to feel differently, and then - thus - get SOMETHING DONE.

Arriving at the Spotify release will probably remain a goal that you like though, and the re-framing thing can be a way to just get out of that harshly critical mindset that eventually might inhibit you, perchance. Or: What if I made a musical piece as an ambient thing aimed at humour actually. And releasing with some little "stupid" ai animation for the laughs?

Or you can find whatever re-framing of process and goal you feel like. Just about ANYTHING. Or, if you want to go straight for the harsh environment that is released audio on streaming platforms where there's only audio and no visuals, no human contact - no smells and nothing else - well this is an art - and the one we are going to teach you. Just tag along and we will get there probably!

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Putting a lower threshold activity in place where you can actually SHARE SOMETHING more often, even if it might not be just as grand—each little thing shared. Such as recording one-minute songs and telling people how it was done. Oh, something else that is unique to you would fit you.

One game could be like.

I have 1 hour to produce a song that I have to show to my best friend.

Whatever I have when the 1-hour meter is hit will then be what I have to send.

Or something like that.

You will know yourself, in part at least, and what you need.

And you might have blind spots too. :)

I myself have for the most part been the super-creative kind of guy who released 10 out of 1000 songs—not because many of them were bad; they were basically always having something unique and amazing, actually. I just had the proclivity to always basically start a new project the day after because of my new inspirations.

So my method was to try to actually streamline a process that was SO QUICK to get through that I COULD RELEASE THE. SAME. DAY. (Or the day after.) That was achieved and made kind of my making the process so easy to get through that I could release basically the sameday. Through also using mainly samples and the digital realm and workflow.

I wrote a few short books like this: I told myself, Write the book that you can FINISH IN ONE SITTING OR TWO.

Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

Not always the smartest for mixing in particular since when you release the same day, you might have lost perspective, but on the other hand, if you are able to make a song SUPER LIGHTNING QUICKLY, then you might STAY in that first, clear perspective that comes from fresh ears, even until you press bounce/export/send mp3.

But that takes a bit of habit, skill, and mastery. To both produce, mix, and finish a track in under one hour.

And that ability comes with time, to remember and know what is a good balance of sounds and knowing the "curve" so that you can work with more confidence and not lose yourself in having no perspective eventually.

(As easily, anyways)

And this "curve" of flat sound that we are referring to is basically just a feeling. Instead of going for what sounds the most compressed, powerful and bassy - we go for that area frequency wise where it starts to open up, where the bass seems open, and airy, uncluttered and free. It's a felt thing as well as a learned thing.

So making the process very digital, where every element can be moved with the click of a mouse and by mouse - That was my approach.

I released like 25 beats in a week using this method for my BeatStars page, where I sell beats online.

<https://freedombeatsofficial.beatstars.com/>.

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These beats, many of them at least got made lightning fast. And it is a sub-category of my main musical aims, but it's SOMETHING that can make things move forward. Compared to getting nothing out there, getting SOMETHING moving, is always better, basically.

Beatmaking to me is very simple and straight forward. I need no vocals and lyrics. The whole song can be made in a very repetitive way, and I know my beatmaking software through and through (Maschine by Native Instruments).

Being somebody who has spent my entire life doing music basically felt almost like a little bit of a cheat code when it comes to making beats.

So many beatmakers start out loving hip hop but knowing little about music.

I, however, had a super head start because I knew basically all the instruments, could explain the entire language of music freely, and had been in countless jamming sessions and played in bands, released music, and had 20+ years of experience in the field.

So making beats came very easily. (EVEN THOUGH MY FIRST BEATS SOUNDED QUITE... Sub-optimal...)

WHAT I KNEW WAS MUSIC. I knew it was MUSIC.

Producing and mixing was a NEW GAME however.

But I felt like I had a head start anyways.

This book is really the essential learnings and findings I have found as it relates to mixing, producing, and crafting (leading up to releasing also) your music.

Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

Let's move on. With the process aspect more in full. It's an important one!



Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

🎵 Process.

So much of your entire musical creation journey will be about your process. If you have a streamlined process going for you where you bit by bit learn, and continuously apply the things, the new things that you learn - then you will keep on growing. And you will be able to tell - after a while - where in your process you might end up having issues. And then those can be looked at, and sorted.

For example you might find yourself creating a lot of ideas but rarely finishing things.

If this example would feel like you, then you can look at some different approaches to get out of that "non-finishing-pattern."

One might be to find another format that is much simpler to do and get over the finishing line. Such as short songs, songs with no vocals - instrumentals or to make short songs for videos that you can upload to your social media.

If you want to boost your ability to make the full-on-projects of yours, then perhaps you might want to first look into where you feel a bit weak and then learn about the craft of whatever it is that keeps you stopping.

If you would find that you start ideas easily for example, but rarely finish, then you might want to look into either - ways to make everything you've started come together through learning in your weaker areas - or - finding out about a process that would be custom tailored to you that allows you to finish tracks with much more ease! Perhaps a different format of making tracks or approaching it from a whole different new angle.

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If your productions end up a bit out of sync with the tempo for example and you are playing real instruments then you could:

Practice your timing. Sit with a metronome or a shaker/percussion loop and just play something simple, and really double down on nailing each and every little stroke, so that it sits RIGHT at the beats. And if you do this for example for 5 minutes every single day for a week or two, then now as you continue making music after it, every single project will draw upon your new, increased skill in playing more tight on the beat. Yup!

Or you could say hmm... Perhaps it is enough that I only use my actual guitar for one track in the song, and the rest I will make using midi-timed-instruments that are super easy to get tight and locked in perfectly. That way you will not over-burden you at your current capacity, but be able to get to a releasable song/track in much faster ways, and also FEEL more like you are moving, and getting somewhere.

And so these are just examples of how you can keep growing, but also go somewhere in the process.

You can find what works for you.

Deadlines?

A simpler form to follow and adhere to?

I have for a long time tried to do it ALL myself. Playing all the instruments, recording and writing the song, mixing it, and even the mastering.)

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This has worked for a bit of music, BUT it is brutally more time- and energy-consuming than having fewer things that you have to master. For example when I made beats, Hip Hop beats instead of full songs, I was able to be something like 257132% more productive and release things.

Because within that PROCESS, every single step was fast, easy and streamlined. No vocal re-takes, no instrument changing, no mic placings - all just clicking in the computer software and making music right there in the program. And since I knew so much about the program, the different sounds and production and mixing overall - the FORMAT I was working within really helped me be super-productive.

A lot of things you might find to be your own "blockages" will however come down to your musical skillsets. That will generally be the case anyways.

And for this - I will refer you to my other books that go in-depth in this topic. Music-Making, learning the LANGUAGE that music is, as well as so many things you can learn in fun ways that relates to becoming a better instrumentalist.

Because if you learn these kinds of basics and skills, they will translate into everything else you could be doing in production and mixing too.

It has, because of the time-consuming nature of doing many different things "at the same time", been a MUST for me to have the simplest, fastest, and most streamlined process going for me so that nothing drags out more than it has to.

(Something almost always does anyways, haha.)

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For example, if I am to record a song by myself and do every bit of the recording and production process myself too, then, well, counting in that I would WRITE the piece too, then standing at a mic, recording as a shaker for 5 minutes to a click track will almost by definition put me in a spot 30 minutes later, when I have also done 3 takes like that because I wasn't completely happy with the first two, and then changed mic positions to record the new instruments (maybe an acoustic guitar and a bass)—where I have lost that initial spark of the song. Now I am repeating myself, and the feeling of the music would usually have faded in presence and feeling and flow a bit.

(Sometimes so much that I would have lost the whole inspiration; that has happened on a few occasions, when the first takes didn't end up the way I wanted them to.)

However, if the whole process is very quick and streamlined and easy to work with in post too, then it gives me or >you< basically something like 900% better odds to be able to remain in the FEELING throughout the process—and THAT makes for good, great, or anyway much, MUCH BETTER MUSIC.

(Definitely if you are playing live instruments or singing.)

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The first takes you do will generally have some little flaw here and there, BUT HAVE MUCH BETTER FEELING than if you are 10 takes in having tried to play the exact same thing over and over. We get out of our feelings through such repetition and into our heads, and now we are so obsessed with technically getting it right that the natural human feeling disappears a little bit, dissipates, and even possibly kind of disappears eventually. The brutal example of this would be demos where you literally make mistakes 10-15 times for each track and it's basically all a mess - but it just HAS SOMETHING TO IT. It just has some kind o breathing, natural feeling that feels so unique and special. Vs when you have potentially over-worked a track and now everything feels much tighter and there are less "mistakes" in it but now that feeling that made the demo magical yet a bit "broken" now has faded basically - kind of in full. Now you have something that sort of feels robotic, a bit life-less and well... kinda dead.

I do not know how many times playing the bass, for example. I have made like 5-10 takes because it is fun to play and I just have the urge to press record again and again, but I end up going for the very FIRST recording anyways.

That has happened over and over, even if that first recoding has some flaws in it.

So do try and figure out a process that works well for you. Where each step can give you something to WORK with, and quickly.

And this goes to say with some serious weight to it:

Since music is felt in the moment so much more than it is analytically "minded" like "rules" - the training you do BEFORE any recording session will be like you setting yourself up to be able to be MORE in the moment, and FEEL the music of the moment, MORE.

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And so then, learning the skillsets and the tricks of the craft and trade will make everything relating to the MOMENT, GENERALLY be much easier. (So long as the training isn't over-robotic and remains a PLAYING activity, where your training is in itself a musical act, not just purely a technical one.

So HOW you train yourself can also be hugely important for this.

That's why our music-making teachings are aimed DIRECTLY at teaching you how to learn in ways that TRANSLATES into free playing, free musical thinking and feeling, and being able to SPEAK MUSIC LIKE A LANGUAGE.

The two other books on these things will go more in-depth in this area of learning.

Having a click track is good because then everything can be copied and pasted in a grid, but the downside is that click tracks are super non-musical. Sometimes it's literally like a blip sound that even sounds harsh and annoying to listen to, and in the wrong key too.

Hack: For shakers, instead of recording them, get loops. SHAKERS AND PERCUSSION loops I have found to be such a life changer when it comes to the whole process. Because they can replace the metronome. And jamming out to a shaker loop with some bongos on it will get you into the FEELING. MUCH MUCH more...

And then your recordings will be in sync with the timing for the whole song so you can *reuse parts of it*.

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If you have a process where you have spent 5 hours working with the music, and at that 5-hour mark, you feel a bit depressed because nothing sounds great to you and you feel like you might have to redo things, that is a big let down and a hindrance to your process of getting to finished music.

However, if your process makes for PIECES of musical ingredients that you like and you can say when you've made them, Man, I LIKE THIS LITTLE THING, - then we can say we've GOT IT and MOVE ON!

This little thing alone can make the whole process fill us up with many more reward chemicals in our brains. DOPAMINE!

Now we can feel like we are moving.

Not standing still. Getting somewhere.

For this to happen with more ease, using click tracks or a metronome (replaceable with shakers & percussion for more feeling) is a GREAT WAY.

Then we can reuse small parts and copy and paste them to new parts of the song.

Also, keeping some part of the song digitally made with MIDI can be a great way to relieve yourself of having to nail every single thing; you can maybe focus more then on, let's say, your vocals and leave out having to get everything else recorded perfectly, because some elements of the song can literally be dragged around in a grid to be exactly where you want them.

This, of course, has so much to do with genre, but still, I found that to be a great help for PRODUCTIVITY.

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AND get out of the "nothing gets finished zone" and arrive at musical pieces, songs, and tracks that gett somewhere instead.

So pro tip: Get yourself some shaker/percussion loops and replace your metronome. (Phil Speiser has a quite cool one that is like 10 dollars that is called Ear Candy Percussion.) Not super huge and extensive, but everything sounds really great, and well, I like them.) (There is a plethora of soundpacks online; you can just look up something that appeals to you that you like and enjoy.) (Stay cool, calm, and collected.) Just kidding. And there are a lot of completeley free packs aroud too. Just goole for example.

Process migh also be a fit chapter to state the most obvious fact in all of the book.

There is nothing on earth basically that will make you grow more than this one thing. Nothing else is as important basically if you want to gain greater skillsets in mixing and production.

Continuity.

Mixing 5 minutes every single day will make you skilled in all regards of mixing eventually.

Vs. A 5 hour session once every other weekend will probably take you forever basically.

So if you can simply find a way to ENJOY making SOMETHIN on a DAILY basis.

You will VERY SOON exell.

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Your short-term memory as WELL as your long term memory will start merging with combined knowledge in mixing and production and you will be like a bucket that just holds more and more. And it will be actual knowledge and not just a saturation of too many words in your mind. Or your brain perhaps we should say.

When you DO it, and DO IT CONTINUOUSLY - then growth is basically guaranteed. (I have a book on working out that is basically only about this concept - if you feel like mixing with a little bit more of a six pack than you already have.) (lol)

Whatever process you can find that makes you feel like actually sitting down and making music daily - will be worth gold bascally.

And another thing:

Thinking about what YOU need in order to SHARE SOMETHING - is pretty great to consider.

Because when we share SOMETHING - SOMETHING can happen in the INDIRECT senses of your music career. People might hear it, stumble upon it, refer it to a friend, and so on. These INDIRECT benefits of your music making can basically NEVER HAPPEN, up until the moment you RELEASE SOMETHING. Kind of.

So 1. You can think about easier to complete formats of art-making that can be shared much faster.

or/and 2: Realizing exactly what your basically strong areas are as well as your basically weaker areas.

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And then making informed choices on how to overcome your specific relativeley sort of weak things.

Pt.2 of Process:

The very order that you mix in could also fall under this category in the book. Where do you start?

Some people start with the vocal and then mix the music around it. Some people start with the music and add the vocals lastly. I really prefer to save the vocals for last, because then I can focus on making the MUSC sound the very best, and then tuck the vocal into it in a way that makes both the vocal, and the music feel really great. There is basically no real right or wrong here.

Kind of.

You can also utilize top-down mixing which means basically mixing groups rather than elements. And starting by paying more attention to the WHOLE, rather than the smaller parts. And change the smaller things based on where the bigger picture, wholeness of the mix is feeling like.

Some people might solo instruments a lot, and some basically never solo at all. To rareley solo means that you will remain in *perspective* more and not run such a big risk of making something that sounds great by itself but doesn't really work in the mix. Soloing can make you realize deeper what an individual sound feels like, and inspire you in another kind of different way.

Personally - I prefer saving the vocal for bascally last - and mixing with a mindset that bases itself on a very intuitive feeling. It's more about what feels fun.

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You can start with drums sometimes. You can start with the pianos sometimes. You can solo all the drums and start from there. You can play everything at once and just pull down the volumes of a lot of things and then sweep them up and down based on your feel and inspiration. But the general "rule" will basically be that it's all based on feeling into the music before you, rather than following a certain procedure. Where does the music take you?

You can sometimes find yourself trying out other people's approaches that might work for them, but really not so much basically for yourself.

I tried an advice once that was to start mixing the loudest part of a song because then the quieter moments fall in naturally and you won't "hit above the roof" in terms of loudness and headspace as it is sometimes referred to.

But to me that felt like well, you never listen from the middle of a song basically. How will I then naturally feel into the rhythm of the song? Everybody's different basically.

It's time for the next chapter!

Mixing And Producing Like A Pro

Compression/Limiting/Saturation

These are things that will "glue" your mix together, and almost by definition (genre dependent, of course) be what adds into making it sound "professional." - (I'm not referring to a one-solution-fixes-all kind of thing here, but what I am saying is that basically ALL MUSIC EVERYWHERE has compression or at least limiting on the final master version. So that, well, now our ears almost recognize music that isn't limited or compressed as "weird sounding."

The "sound" that music has in basically all places that you hear it will be compressed or limited in some regard. (And Limiting basically refers to compression to such an extreme extent that beyond the threshold on the compressor/limiter you will hear nothing, it will stop the sound completely beyond the threshold. - A compressor would start to "dip" the sound where the threshold is at, and so in the same way the limiter also starts where the threshold is but the limiter completely "says no" to any sounds coming through beyond the threshold. So a limiter is in essence a more extreme compressor.

I have split feelings about this "sound" that we have been talking about but have started to reconcile with it.

(Jazz, btw, might be an exception, or classical music.) In those genres we actually are more used to the other way around—really limited use of compression and limiting. (No pun intended.)

When working with compression we will "buy" *fatness* at the cost of dynamics. Transients (the initial "kick" and "spike" of the sounds) will also come through a bit softer usually.

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The dynamic loss is what I'm referring to when I said I've had some mixed feelings about it because sometimes a mix can just seem so much clearer and have more "space" in it with little or no compression in it. But what you often get using compression is just happening to "sound like music".

For most other music, we are super used to hearing that "glue" that compression and limiting gives us. And this also makes the overall musical piece and mix generally softer on the ears, everything gets a bit *smoothed* out. (Once I played Battlefield 2142 or whatever the title was and this was right after a mixing session I think - and realized just how compressed all the sounds were.)

Compression is often a tradeoff—too much of it will have the ability to make our tracks and sounds overall feel really dead and "flattened out," kind of.

None of it might make the song feel like, well, not a song. We are super used to the "glue," like I said.

So learn how to compress and limit your tracks and songs in a way that makes YOU DIG IT, and probably others will too.

(Here is an area where I've found that different plugins can make a HUGE difference.)

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Saturators, for example, which are a form of harmonic distortion (increasing the level of certain overtones in the sounds), have a compressor-like sound to them, but often more extreme, going towards clipping, or should I say distorting, eventually. But they can help in "smoothing out" the feeling of the various elements being "separated" too much, and suddenly everything is the "same song" again. You have applied the "glue," and everything "grooves together instead. Saturation can really give some life and warmth to an otherwise a bit stale and "stiff" sounding vocal for example.

When using compression you will generally be looking at some very specific potentiometers (the round knobs that you can turn to dial in different values) and they would be:

Check the next page!

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Ratio:

How much the compressor will "do" when the threshold kicks in.

Threshold:

WHEN the compressor will start the "doing". A threshold at -10 db for example will mean that the compressor starts working when a certain sound goes through it that is at least -10 db in volume.

Attack:

How soon after the sound comes in, that is above the threshold that you have set, the compressor starts "working".

Release:

How much time it will take for the compressor to "cool down" again after a sound has passed the threshold.

What the compressor does when it "does what it does" is basically stop sound that is above the set threshold and keep it down, depending on how strong the ratio is set at. So it's basically a plugin that well... compresses sound. When the loudest parts of the soundwaves are kept down, it means that the entirety of the sound often will sound just the way the word points to actually. Compressed. Like you are trying to squeeze a certain amount of juice through a small opening. It makes everything sound more intense you could say.

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But it has nuance to it. If you compress everything "too much" then there will be very little dynamic in the sound a.k.a no louder parts and no quieter parts - and that can make it sound well... the opposite of powerful and fat. It all depends. On your taste when you are turning the knobs. Some compressors will be just one knob that does everything and you just dial in how much of it you want. Others have all these different (4) or more sometimes potentiometers that you can turn to control the sound. Generally though - if you just understand the basics of what these 4 knobs do - then you will probably be able to fly on feeling pretty quickly, because you will quite frankly feel when things get better, and when they just... get worse.

However you should definitely just try the experience of turning up a compressor and going hard with it on a soloed drumkit. That just so happens to be one of the sweetspots for compression if you ask me. (Not always useable in mixes as hard as you would want it because at that point when you have many other components in your mix you might want to keep the drums a bit open and still punchy so that there is room for the other things. But if you have the room: Go hard with that compressor. It's like having an espresso. And a redbull. An a beer. At the same time. While riding a dirtbike. Downhill. Fast.

Okay so how are we feeling? This chapter didn't go too deeply into technicalities of compressors because quite frankly - you do not always need it. Probably.

If it feels right it is right kind of.

And so what could we say on compression more than what we have already said?

Well... They could be grouped with saturators and limiters aswell.

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Because the effect if these things will be a sound that "glues" together. But in different ways.

Saturation will add harmonic overdrive to your signal, going from fuller, more alive and "natural" - than a completeley didital and clean sound - into insane overdrive that rings like a bell.

Saturation can be very good to make any sound feel more alive and natural. Because overtones are present in all natural sounds. Incresing these in volume will make the sound feel more full. This you do not always want though, for elements you want further back in the mix saturation might make them become a "muddy" component that hinders the clarity of main focal point - elements in your mix. But for let's say a vocal - some saturation will often even be almost like a staple sound. That you will probably like and also hear on most productions that hit the radio aswell. Saturation brings asound into more fullness, thickness and fatness.

You could imagine it ike this:

Unsatúrated sounds: -----oooo-----oooooooo-----ooo-----

Saturated sounds: -----oooooooooooooooooooooooo-----

The "line" here represents the frequency spectrum and the o's are supposed to represent three sounds within a mix. When the saturation is added, we get a bit fuller sounds and also as a bi-product, the result of the spaces in-between the sounds getting "smaller".

Compression will make it "swell" and "bounce" more (if you have a good amount of it that is not over the top - thus killing the dynamics completeley.)

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And limiting - which is basically really hard compression will make a track sit together much more and usually sound more "radio ready". Even when it's not sounding all that much better sonically - limiting your track just a tiny bit will often make it feel "believable" in another certain way - as if "yeah... that sounds more like a record".

Limiting can also be a way know for certain that what you upload to Spotify for example, will not be tinkered with after you hit send, because through limiting you can be sure that no sound reached above a certain loudness. If you go over -1 db basically anywhere your track will be processed to bring it down. And different streaming services have different "rules".

And this might not be the most professional advice, but hey...

I would say do not obsess completely over these things. The numbers. If you have a track that is loud enough, sounds good enough and feels believable - you will go SOMEWHERE with it. Check out the rocket-fuel-injection analogy.

But there are different ways to think about this.

You might even want to hire a professional mastering engineer to get your song sounding the very best when it comes out. But a master can only build on a mix.

The mix is the foundation. The mastering is the last step of the process where you make sure that the entirety of your track, often in a single stereo file - will sound the best THAT FILE possibly can, on most systems.

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This is optional, how you think about it. But if you turn up your track, right alongside some famous, popular song and feel like hey! "Mine sounds alright next to this commercial track - then why should you obsess further?"

It's after all the MUSIC that will speak to people, and the mixing is only there to make the music better, too. If the MUSIC comes across as amazing. You have probably hit the mark.

And here I will just throw in a pretty "meta" kind of mixing and production advice. It's slightly off topic relating to just compression alone, but it will "glue" into everything in this book basically. It's something to follow you throughout the process, rather than any single move you make in mixing your tracks.

It builds on this fact:

A mix is the various parts making up the WHOLE of the song.

Aspects and a whole at the same time, they are one because they groove in the same song, together.

And so a great mix will always basically be the ENTIRETY of the song, sounding great with the... REST of the song. If your song for example has a bass, a guitar, some vocals and a drumkit - then what objectively is a good drumsound for that song will be a balance between the other elements of the song. The best sounding drums in solo with super hard compression and hard hitting transients as well might completely take away from the presence of the guitars for example. And so, it's all a journey basically of making a WHOLE, in which everything works well together.

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And <THAT> can actually be accomplished through process rather than super-detailed advice on how to mix certain things "objectiveley".

Because if you start mixing some part of the song for example - then the mixing move you do next will probably be dictated by what you already feel for the thing you just did, or completed. So if you started with let's say drums, now the way THEY sound, will influence how you mix the guitars, naturally. And then when the bass is up for mixing and tweaking, you will make your decisions based on what the DRUMS, and the GUITARS sound like already. This way, towards the end of your mixing process, you will have made choices that continually made each new element fit with all the rest.

This is something that I think a lot of people do not think about too much. But it can serve us greatly. And to just know about this might be an "aha" moment because when you go back to mixes, and you feel like hmm the kick drum sound doesn't sound as good as I'd like it, and then you change it -now perhaps the rest of the "sense" of the other mixing choices stop making as much sense again.

When your kick got much fatter and deeper and louder, suddenly both individual things about other instruments and parts of the mix might need something new to work greatly with the new kick drum - but also the whole might lose that almost ethereal, wholeness that made sense before.

And so you can use this to your advantage.

You can at the start of projects be aware of this, and figure out early what elements are the most predominantly "important" ones to hear up-front for example with easy focus happening naturally on them let's say.

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And then you know that early on - you can start to make decisions that will in your mind very likely follow the mix throughout the process up until the finishing moves and touches.

That way, your NATURAL SENSE for how each new element should be mixed and sound in the song can "give you" a very good mix "right off the bat" that you do not have to change too many fundamental things in.

Because when we make each new mixing decision based on the other things we already have in the mix, we naturally will make them fit because well, they sound the best those ways!

And when that has been a thing running throughout your entire (basically) process - then you might naturally find that your overall mixes sound cohesive and nice throughout.

And you might skip hours of extra-work and over-thinking about relatively un-important things too much because we change one thing, and that makes something else sound worse, and because of that we change a third thing, and 18 steps down the line we start thinking about whether the first thing we had was actually better than what we have now? Hmmm.....

We can bypass so much of this by kind of "anchoring" sort of SOMETHING, that we KEEP the way it is. Because with one such solid point of reference, and now the consecutive mixing choices are made in RELATIONSHIP to that "solid" thing, now everything will start falling into place with EACH OTHER. (If everything changes all the time we might fall into this "chasing our own tail" sort of endlessly.

Something to think about.

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And this will probably grow with time. Your ability to "decide" on the "yeah this sounds good and I will keep this this way it is now, or only change 5-10% of the sound, no more.

That way, you might enhance your time needed per project basically a thousandfold. (needing much less time and not second guessing as much basically.)

"Yep this sounds good, let's move on and get this finished"

Instead of: "Hmm Its been 9 hours now and I'm just not sure about this kick drum... What if I poured some milk-shake on the mixing desk, set it on fire and did a certain, extravagantly silly dance - that might get me the kick sound that would make the song "click" because everything I've tried just haven't worked."

What was the point of this little tip?

To simply make you aware of the "connected" nature of all sounds within a mix, both being separate things as well as a whole, together.

And that through making a new mix call based on the old one, on the other instrument that you have decided is good enough, can make the entire process be like building onto a house that just gets more and more stable, beautiful and clear. Rather than spinning around basically too much in circles.

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I am not paid to say this, but I just have to share my experience with a series of plugins from Slate Digital (that you can get for something like 20 dollars a month).

sound just TERRIFIC.

I recently rediscovered them for, like, the third time.

having not used them in a long while and again trying them out.

They just BLEW MY MIND AGAIN.

The MINUTE detail of them, the subtlety and liveliness, is just mind-blowing. And I'm sure there are other plugin companies that have similar-grade plugins, but hey, these are the ones I've tried and used. (That blows my mind in THIS way.) Most other plugins really work, but "get the job done."

It's. Quite. Nice. To. BE. Blown . . . Away.

Sfgand Thus, I think I just simply had to mention them. If you want a full plugin suite that has everything, and everything in there feels like WORLD-CLASS PLUGINS, then I would warmly recommend Slate Digital.

(Also, I will say this, even though it will make a lot of people mad, probably.)

The Soundgoodizer in FruityLoops sounds freaking great in many situations for radio ready -kind of sound.

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(But use it with taste and feel. Sometimes a lot works; there is a clear line where you start wrecking your track—it will feel like "more" but also become worse at a certain point, as is the case with most saturation plugins/compressors/limiters.

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🎵 Arrangement (and Musical Cadence)

To get in to the topic of arrangement (which could essentially include a lot of things) we will first up discuss one of the most primal, core concepts that we think relate to it, at a core level. This has not even got to do with what instruments play what and where in the frequency spectrum they will be situated. This will be the pure, rhythmic "language" and cadence that will be something like an undercurrent, a baseline for WHEN anything NEW happens in the mix/arrangement.

Listen to four beats (could be you clapping your hands or making a sound).

Feel the "feeling" of four beats in a row; they feel like a unit, and then it starts over.

Now feel four blocks of four beats in a row—we could call this a four beat bar x 4 - or 4 bars simply - now every four bars will also feel like a unit, and now you've played four x four-beats - 4 bars, and now a "new cycle" feels like it begins.

Moving on - Clap 8 times and feel the feeling. Stay with it for a while. How do you feel when you have clapped 8 times?

Now clap 9 times, and feel the feeling. How do you feel when you've clapped 9 times?

The 9th time will actually feel like a closure, because you have also potentially clapped the first beat of the next bar. But if you clap 8 times, it feels like it wants to continue.

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Do you feel this? That 8 claps feels like a closure of the first 2 bars, but it doesn't really rest that much? It wants to go on? Vs. 9 claps, or 2 bars + the 1st beat of a new bar - feels like you've "stopped" at the first beat of something that also can then feel like a "logical" ending?

No song basically ever ends on the 8th beat. We almost always end on the first beat of the last bar.

We are starting basically, here, so that you can start to get a feel for a "cycle" - that will be possible to be felt in *micro* - zoomed "in" - as well as in *macro* - zoomed "out". - Where the 4 beats of one bar will be the zoomed "in" version, and the 4 entire bars will also feel like one "unit" - and being the "zoomed out" version. Version of what?

A cadence, a pulse, a pattern of rhythm that speaks to us in a certain way. We feel that a new "beginning" begins at the 1ST beat of each "block". And the "blocks" can be found in a short, 4 beat pattern way, and also in 4 x 4 beats = 4 bars kind of way. (Or even more "zoomed out" such as in 16 whole bars - that will be the standard rap verse for example)

We begin here basically because if you get just a simple feel for this, it will be able to be like a baseline for when you should allow something new to be heard within your arrangement. And it kind of flows a simple pattern, the one basically that we have described above in short. (We will describe it in more detail and nuance very soon!

This "rhythm" is basically a universal language.

And when it comes to arrangement, this is one of the kind of bigger things to understand.

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But now first, let's discuss arrangement in a bit of a more wide perspective.

I would think of arrangement in three categories being as one. Read about these on the next page.

1. Cadence—What we just talked about a bit through the clapping analogy.
2. Instrumentation—One word to point to what elements come in and where. And also what they play - how bright or how low it is, and also how it is designed rhythmically.
3. Effect—One word to point to the creative aspect of not just following a script but actually making transitions into new parts based on what we want to feel artistically.

Cadence: This is a rhythmical language. If we are in 4/4 time signature, which means four beats per bar, then four beats will "complete one bar," but also four bars will complete "a bar of bars."

It's like a fractal, a spiral. And by that we mean that you can get the "same feeling" basically everywhere in the "zoom" - in or out - kind of independently of how zoomed in or out you are.

Usually, if we are in 4/4, which most songs are in most music, then each four bars, or 16 beats, we generally want to add SOME change. That's one example of cadence in arrangement.

A verse for example usually does really well with just a really simple instrumentation along with a vocal. The actual space is often really good for the verses.

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AND - that makes for choruses that almost automatically sound bigger and fatter and more powerful because we came from something much smaller. And so for whatever comes after the verse could simply be a slight Chord Change perhaps - and then just ONE new added rhythmic element.

And each time you feel like things need something new, just play with adding ONE extra element. But where 16 whole bars have been completed, we usually want a bigger change such as a new part. It's basically all about the feeling of it. That's one example of instrumentation.

And wanting the Chorus to hit as hard as we possibly can, and thus designing the *verse* to be purposefully smaller in comparison to gain a bigger contrast between the verse and the moment the Chorus kicks in - That's an example of *effect*.

Let's continue with some repetition and further information.

Music and rhythm has patterns to it, that feels just simply natural to us. A lot of this is habit, what we are used to, but some is actually quite fundamentally just present, basically always as mathematical principles.

When we are in 4/4 time-signature, which means 4 beats per bar - then the fifth beat will just naturally feel like the beginning of a new bar to us.

But the 9th beat will also feel like a beginning, and an even more clear beginning.

2 x 4 beat bars will feel like ONE unit, and the 9th beat that comes when the first 8 beats have been played will feel like the FIRST beat, of the second (double-bar, or 4+4 beats) "unit".

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1, 2, 3, 4...

1, 2, 3, 4...

If you just hum this, you can feel a groove within it, that also "changes" into the finishing of one segment - and going into the new segment - at given moments.

Here comes more:

1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4...

1 - - - 2 - - - 3 - - - 4 - - - ...

Do you see here the picture we are trying to paint?

The "zoom" that we are trying to explain? That the feeling you get rhythmically "loops", and can exist both in the smaller - more "zoomed in" versions of 4 beats - and also the more "zoomed out" versions of 4 bars played consecutively.

This will make sense to you when thinking in terms of arranging a song, because following this pattern of "feeling" - and rhythm - new elements and parts of the song can be introduced. An example could be that you have 4 bars of intro, into 16 bars of verse, into 2 bars of build up or bridge, into 16 bars of chorus and then basically that pattern repeats, but without the intro 4 bars, all the way basically until we get to some form of an ending/outro.

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Another example: 1 x 16 bars of a build-up that starts at the first beat after the bridge with a "boom trademark sound" with a lot of reverb and almost nothing else happening, and then for the entire 16 bars of the build-up we just slowly increase the intensity of the music but without a solid chorus going - just a sweep with noise that gets brighter and brighter, and the whole song hangs around at the 6th Chord Feel (minor chord) for the ENTIRE 16 Bars of the Build-Up.

But the last 4 bars of the build-up will go into complete silence regarding all sweeps and instruments, and now we will just have a really frickin swinging drum-fill with toms and snares of various pitches that descend in pitch so the drumfill goes from brighter toms and snares into darker pitched toms and snares like a: rap, app, app pam pom boom. (If you know what i mean lol)

Into the Chorus that will also be 16 bars x 2 where the second part, the second 16 bars - will have an even more elaborate feeling than the first 16 bars. Doesn't have to be a lot but just some elements needs to go into the second 16 bars that wasn't there in the first 16 bars such as a new shaker, a little embellishment of the melody with a new synth of just the fact that it really bites down on the groove with some new hand-drums and no vocal at all. But the first 16 bars of the Chorus had a vocal that sang the main hook line and melody of the Chorus and the song.

And then the pattern repeats in the sense that each time 16 bars have passed - something has to change. You will probably be able to get a feel for this and not have to think too much. You will feel the song getting boring basically, if you do not "hit" these "principles" well enough basically. And if you feel bored at some moment, you can just basically remember this, and see where a new 16 bars begin - and add some little element.

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Because it's almost like a formula.

The music almost always wants something new each 16th bar.

Like a big change, such as going into a chorus from a verse or from the verse into a bridge.

Just getting a feel for these "bigger slices of rhythmic patterns"

Can really make arrangement so easy.

Another example.

4 bar intro.

(The intro aspect can sometimes be a little bit like a wild-jack - here I'm imagining simply a sound that slowly sweeps in in volume and has a lot of reverb such as a reversed vocal note in a house music production.)

16 bars for the verse - vocal, finger snaps on 2 and 4 + a synth pad that sweeps up underneath a filter so that it gets a little bit more intense all the time but really slowly.

16 bars for a bridge that is basically like a 2nd part of the verse, but with a new melody. Here we want some new elements to make the song interesting and bypass that slight (or strong) "dying" feeling we can get if 16 bars have passed without anything happening or changing.

You can basically have this "grid" within you as a musical feel when arranging all the parts.

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Let's say we have an intro that starts with a drumbeat, a shaker, and some little reverb-tail effect, like the beginning of a DJ'ed house track. Generally, we would want to make SOMETHING happen in the next 16-bar "loop." And also really often each 8 bar loop too. The 16 bar "loop" often wants a bigger change, and the 8 bar "loop" wants smaller changes. Quite generally.

It often doesn't have to be something huge, but if the music remains EXACTLY THE SAME for longer than 8 or 16 bars, we can quite likely feel that, meh, something's off here.

(Do not read this as a technical RULE you MUST follow, but rather approach it through your feeling; you will FEEL THIS.

If you make a certain amount of bars happen BEFORE the chorus, it might sound less powerful than if there was a longer buildup, and if the buildup were too long, then we'd miss that window" of "perfect sync."

GET A FEEL FOR THIS.

Example of instrumentation: We could think of space within both frequency spectrums and also rhythm while considering arrangement as it relates to instrumentation.

For example, 10 pianos that play all in the lowest octave WILL basically clog everything up down there frequency wise and you will be in muddy, thick and boomy territory where nothing can be heard basically. But if you said okay, 5 pianos is the sort-of maximum I will allow, and remove 5 pianos, and the other 4 pianos can only play in brighter octaves, then the bass will be freed up for that first piano to be really low and dark. And then the process repeats, if you feel like it's cluttered further up as well, you can separate pianos by giving them spaces of their own where no other piano is playing.

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We know - weird example but still it kind of gives the main point.

Now instead of 5 pianos, you might have a bass, 2 guitars, a synthpad and some drums, a vocal and some shakers.

In the same way basically, we might want to assign "roles" to them, that makes them play in ways that fit with the rest. And this can go BOTH frequency spectrum "speaking" as well as rythmically speaking. For example. One guitar might be given the role to play mellow and midrange-to-low chord figures. Both quite "dark" and also long notes. The other guitar then might be assigned the role to either, play long notes but much brighter and up the neck so that it doesn't clash too much with the lows in the first guitar, or perhaps rythmically separating it from the first guitar, so that the first guitar doesn't get too much COMPETITION, but rather complementary qualities playing next to it. So that second guitar might play shorter notes, and in a more rythmical way.

The vocal might be listened to when writing the 2nd guitar part so that it still has room and feels like the "main attraction".

The bass will basically be the lowest thing playing, and it will be written while sort of trying to be best friends with the kick drum, to blend in with it.

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This booklet was written in two separate stages you could say. So now, we will sort of "begin again" with similar topics, like a re-run of the things we have discussed, but giving more nuances and also more, further perspectives.

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Room Treatment

This is one of these things that will affect everything you do in every single later stage in mixing. The "flatter" your frequency response is in your room, as well as the better the reverberation is controlled in your room, the more you will be able to hear the exact music you are mixing and less of the effect the room is having on it. Let's say you are mixing in a room that has a huge size, like a hangar (extreme example, I know, but that is to make the point super clear), then everything will sound reverberant to YOU. Even though the music itself is not. Because even your completely close-miced, present, and "dead" sounds—reverberation-wise speaking—will leave your speakers and bounce around in the hangar room.

This will make you feel like a certain mix will become the best sounding, but it will be based on what sounds best in THAT ROOM. In another, smaller room, your mix will sound completely different.

So if you just get some simple acoustic absorbers, they can be made D.Y.I.—by yourself following some guides on YouTube, for example—or they can be bought. I have made a bunch of these and sold them in one of my businesses, and it's really not that hard to make them. You just need a frame. You need insulation material like rock wool or glass wool, for example, and you need some fabric to cover it. The frame can be built with wooden boards that do not need to be too thick or heavy at all. The insulation can be bought at construction material shops, and the fabrics I've gotten from IKEA actually come in the form of sheets.

For the bed. That way the price for pretty good fabrics was super low. Finding used acoustic absorbers on, for example, Facebook Marketplace is usually not that impossible either if you'd like to keep the price down.

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Every room is different, though, and to get a REALLY well-treated room, there is A LOT you might want to do to get to something like a professional-grade studio in your own room or space.

But a little goes a long way too. Just two acoustic panels made a HUGE difference in my recording studio when I first set it up long ago. Going from recording in that room completely untreated, with no acoustic absorbers, to recording in it with just two of them COMPLETELY changed the quality of the recordings, making them sound more tight, present, and professional.

So you CAN go very far with treatment, but a little goes a long way too.

On the next page we will move on to: The ONE thing I would teach people when it comes to the very first step, or most essential skill to have as a mixer, that will basically be the starting point for most of your music-making.

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🎵 The "curve", or "The sound of music".

Sound has been travelling through various stages to reach the place and stage finally where it is to travel through the last pair of speakers, headphones, or whatever listening contraption that is will be played through.

And also speakers have often been sought to deliver the best possible sound as well.

And so countless engineers have, through recorded history, worked towards making the music sound the very best played on any speaker.

What stands out then is the "curve."

How much of each frequency should there be to get the best overall sound?

What I'm referring to is not how anything **MUST** be done, but if you simply understand and get a feel for this "curve," then whatever you mix and make will ultimately "sync up" with all these other really well-mixed songs.

In your own speakers or headphones, there will generally always be a "personal curve" where you will have a slightly different blend of frequencies than everybody else.

But notice here that there is then this "magical neutral place" in the middle of everybody's different "curves" of frequency response.

A place in the middle, where you are then in regards to your "curve" in the place where your balances of different frequencies will sound good in most other speakers.

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THIS. Is what I mean with the "sound of music"—and "the "curve to rule them all."

THIS is simply what we call "flat frequency response."

Use your ears—what feels great feels great. Read that again. Then we can learn technicalities to learn how to take that great feeling and concept deeper!!

We want to be able to hear each frequency as well as any other.

If you have seen an EQ plugin that shows a frequency spectrum on it, you will be familiar with it going from bass to treble. From around 20 Hz to around 20,000 Hz.

Where 20 Hz is to the far left and really low in pitch, and 20,000 Hz is to the far right and really high in pitch.

If your own speaker configuration would, let's say, give you much more bass than what would be heard in the flat/neutral "curve," then you will mix what sounds great to you, but when heard on other platforms and in other speaker settings and configurations, you will suddenly hear a very different mix. And you will feel like, Dang, why does it sound like crap all of a sudden?

This is why the most essential thing to learn is "how" this neutral, flat "curve" sounds on >YOUR< system.

And how do we do this? In the easiest way possible?

- We just listen regularly to great mixes ON THE SYSTEM WE WILL BE MIXING AT.

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Let's say you right now listened to 10 songs in a row on your system and then started mixing your own music; likely you would start to learn when you deviate too much from this "curve" and when you are "locked in."

This, my friends, is, anyways, exactly what happens when you upload your tracks/songs to Spotify and then listen to them alongside other people's songs and mixes.

So it is just doing it BEFORE you might compare on Spotify and thus learning how to get your mixes sounding great on there BEFORE you upload.

Less headaches, more happiness, and more musical ecstasy.

(There are, of course, almost a million other things to learn in the field of music making and producing, but this one, as it relates to mixing, is the most important one, and the ONE THING I would tell anyone who wants to get great at mixing. - Because it comes BEFORE basically anything else. Even the fader balances. Because those will be heard through YOUR LISTENING SYSTEM. And finding what that "flat" frequency response sounds like on YOUR system - is key.

And all of the other tips in this book will, together with this one, build on your total mixing and production skills.

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And there is a really easy way to learn this.

This is just almost funny how easy it actually is to learn how to "meet the engineers of the ages" and make mixes that stand up to par with them.

You simply have to listen to their music in YOUR SPEAKER SETTING.

Because when you learn how THEIR AWESOME MIXES—that have gone through million-dollar studios and been made by people with decades of experience in music making—sound on YOUR SYSTEM, then your ears will naturally start to know what this "natural" and "flat" curve is on YOUR OWN SYSTEM.

So, for example, let's say you have a system that has very little bass in it; then you will, through listening to great mixes on your own system, learn well what you yourself should aim for to land in that neutral, flat zone with the other great mixes. And since your system has very little bass in it, you will be able, through your knowledge and feel for how GREAT MIXES sound on YOUR SYSTEM, to fit your own mixes to this "curve" that will sound unique in your system but then land in this neutral, flat zone anyways. Because you know how much bass your own system needs to get to that neutral zone, even though your own system is not completely flat or neutral.

So that was a little bit technical. To speak to your artistic sense instead, this whole most essential point is just this:

You want to get a FEEL for a kind of CURVE of the sound. Like an image. How the bass FEELS when it's at a good level compared to your other frequencies, for example. You want to get a FEEL for this curve. And this is done by learning, knowing, and getting a FEEL for how this "curve of sound" sounds and feels like on your OWN SYSTEM.

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🎵 Speaker Placement

Next up will be the speaker placement. (Even though the acoustics of your room are probably even more important.)

Why? Because this is just so fun.

And it is because the stereo field—both speakers—hits you EXACTLY at the same time. Even an inch in the "wrong direction," as far as speaker placement goes, can quite severely take away the pristine clarity of this "phantom center."

And how many people do you know who have even ever talked about this?

I'll just tell you that the first time I adjusted my speakers like this and heard "it" for the first time... I was just completely blown away. I basically cried. Because I loved it so much.

I had never heard music like that before in my life, it felt like.

So do not miss out!

Tweak it - the speaker placement - in a stereo configuration, a triangle forming "between your head, and the two speakers - until you can hear a clear phantom center. It means that the speakers are hitting you simultaneously enough that the stereo image and field becomes totally synced basically. You will be able to hear the individual things in the stereo field as if they are in their own really pinpointed place. And so you want to listen to a song while tweaking this that has a very centered element in the middle, such as a vocal, so that you really notice when it "clicks" and you suddenly hear the vocal in the "phantom center," floating in thin air as it were.

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I normally listen to the song "Astronaut" by Salem Al Fakir to test this, because that song has a very clear vocal right in the middle. And then I cross-check with "Wonderchild" by Christian Walz because that one has instruments like a guitar that, when the speaker placement is on point, will come out very crisp and clear. When my phantom center is on point, I hear everything very clearly. As if they are in the room. But you could find some other songs, of course. (If the songs have very stereo-widened elements, however, you will not notice this phantom center as much at all, and adjusting your speakers will be much harder.)

And if you have never experienced it, let's do it right now.

You want the speakers placed at EAR HEIGHT (not firing into your stomach, for example, but right into your ears.)

This alone will make you hear a much more accurate frequency spectrum.

So get books or stands for your speakers and make them be at EAR HEIGHT. (The ears would often be right in between the tweeter (treble speaker) and the cone (the bigger speaker element).

And the second step is to make them point towards you as if your head and the speakers are in a triangle, and the distance is the same between the speakers and your head. (An Equilateral Triangle)

What you want to achieve is the "phantom speaker" in the middle.

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That means when the distance between the speakers is optimally adjusted, you will be able to hear the stereo image very clearly, and an "invisible speaker" will be able to be heard right in the middle of the two speakers. And things panned right in the middle of your track will often be heard as something almost "standing there in the room."

A voice, for example, could be heard as "hovering in space" right there in between the speakers. As if there was a third speaker there, in between your two speakers.

This, I think, is one of the most magical things in music making, and many people have probably never, ever experienced this.

And it makes music sound SO MUCH BETTER.

 Standing waves:

This is when the distances of walls, for example, facing each other create a certain "bouncing effect" where the sound in a very certain frequency "bounces" between the walls, and a little part of the frequency spectrum that the room resonates with gets very amplified.

(Dips in frequency response can also be a thing, the other way around—where you hear LESS of some certain frequencies.) But standing waves can be a real problem and can also be quite difficult to treat since it will require a more thorough approach with probably many more and thicker absorbers.

What you want then is to essentially hinder those standing waves from happening in the room by putting up absorbing materials that hinder them from bouncing.

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And the general rule is this: The lower the pitch of the sound waves, the thicker, or really the denser, the absorber needs to be to be able to stop them. BUT. There is a cap as well, because if you were to put up the densest possible material, like a steel plate or something, well, this will instead basically be just a new wall, which makes the sound not really become absorbed within it but just bounce right off of it.

So you want to "capture the sound waves" and slow them down rather than bounce them back again. Therefore, insulation materials are good because they are dense enough to absorb sound waves but "soft" enough to not bounce them back too much.

If you want an extensive walkthrough on this topic, I would recommend Jesco from Acoustic Insider. He is really amazing at explaining the deep technicalities of acoustic treatment and a really nice guy to listen to. He really knows what he is talking about.

Yep, that's the guy I would go to.

🎵 Referencing (You will do it in the end anyways, on Spotify) - A bit of repetition.

This is, like I mentioned earlier, basically what teaches you the biggest secret in how to reach a sound that translates across many devices and can sound good just about anywhere.

And to do this:

Listen to other people's GREAT mixes in YOUR listening environment.

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AND: You can have a really SHITTY speaker to listen to also. Like a cheap Bluetooth speaker that sounds like absolute crap.

Because the magical and slightly funny thing is this: IF your music sounds great on that one, then it will sound AWESOME basically anywhere else. And since that is the case, this can actually be the best equipment to add to your arsenal.

A shitty speaker.

Try it and see the impact across devices!

These shitty speakers normally have very bad low-end, and because of that, you really need to have good separation and clear-sounding elements within the mix. And if you can *feel the song* EVEN THOUGH the bass is really terrible on that Bluetooth speaker, now you can know that your bass elements make it through just about any listening environment.

I think it's quite valid to say that, hey! I want to stretch the musical experience as far as I can, and even make music that almost requires a great speaker setup to be heard, for example, music that needs big subwoofers or great headphones. But that might not be the thing that most producers want to aim for. Most producers will probably want to make music that will appeal to the masses. At least mixing-wise, they want their music to be able to be appreciated on any sound system. And for that purpose, listening on shitty speakers is a great "hack."

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I personally have had a "battle with the sound system in my parents house, in the kitchen.

My mixes often sounded quite bad on that system, almost as a rule, but on my own mixing setup, they sounded much, much better. But then when I listened to other people's mixes on THAT SYSTEM in my parents beautiful kitchen (but with the speakers that I just didn't like with my music on them), now I heard that music really COULD sound great on them.

It was just MY mixes that didn't translate to them very well at all.

Here I will drop a name of a product actually, for anybody who wants one way to get REALLY certain tht they arehearing a flatter frequency response than let's say your bad room.

- Slate VSX (option for bedroom producers who want a "perfect room" without having a "perfect room")

This is a GREAT option to look into if you want to just, right off the bat, basically SKIP the whole room problem thing completely. These are a pair of headphones that come with computer plugin software that you run in your DAW. With that, you can then "hear" everything as if you were in a completely flat room.

You can even pick what rooms you want to listen in on.

And these have gotten hugely positive reviews; it's not just me.

They are a little bit pricey but still basically not at all, I would say, because they allow you to feel confident about what you are hearing without needing basically anything else.

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And it can be used for referencing listening as well as full-on mixing. AND. HERES the thing that really makes it for me. THEY SOUND GREAT.

AND FUN.

TO MIX IN.

I LIKE THEM.

I had another pair in a similar price range a while ago—I hated them basically every second of using them.

They were very flat, but nothing sounded enjoyable in them.

The Slate VSX's, though, sound so good that, well... tears—tier—musical experiences can be possible in them.

That's just me.

They are great.

And they are around 400 dollars, I think, new, and you could get a used pair with the software for around roughly half of that.

(It's an option anyways—they are freaking awesome!)

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Plugins—Good Sounds (and great alternatives, a list of them)

I will recommend Slate Again, even though this is another company. Slate Digital does these plugins, and Steven Slate made the VSX's.

This is a little bit funny because I am actually not paid at all by Slate Digital or anyone, for that matter, to write anything in here.

The virtual mix rack you get with the Slate Digital Bundle is just amazing. And for 20 dollars or around that a month, it's worth it. Because some plugins just so happen to actually be ones that actually can make your jaw drop a little.

But there are so many plugins of great value and quality out there. Safari Pedals make great sounding plugins with great interfaces - fun to look at and use. And most plugin-subscription bundles will have something great in them. Most FL Studio - stock plugins are great. So read these recommendations with an open mind and not like I have the keys to the whole world. Those were just some of my likings.

This is an interesting part. O.T.T. is great for electronic music and is free. It's a hard-hitting exciter/compressor.

Slate Digital All Access Pass—a set of plugins that are just immaculately perfect. Eargasm material. And available for a monthly subscription of something like 20 dollars a month

Safari Audio—they too have great-sounding plugins with a twist. They are fun to work with and fast to use. And they sound great. Also available in a subscription model that is every single plugin that they have made for around 97 dollars a year.

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Crispy Tuner—an auto-tune plugin that we think sounds and works great. Available within the Plugin Alliance Subscription model. This subscription pack is HUGE. And some of the plugins are really high-standard.

Mixbus—a DAW that to me is a little bit quirky BUT somehow my mixing just seems to turn out better on that system and others, and I think it isn't necessarily about how it SOUNDS, but rather, the WORKFLOW. The whole program resembles an analog mixing console/desk, and thus, the whole mixing process gives you another visual input. And everything is REALLY easy to send to mix buses, where tracks can be summed/grouped, and then in those buses, we can apply grouped processing for the entire groups. And what can I say? I just LOVE the look of it. And as far as I'm concerned, the more you like just being in the environment, the better for the productivity and creativity.

The stock plugins in FL Studio are generally REALLY GOOD.

FL Studio—a great-sounding DAW. All DAWs will sound good enough to make things on, but sometimes the whole added-together experience leads to a unique overall feel.

The standard limiter that by default is loaded at the end of your mixing chain naturally makes what you create in FL Studio sound a bit "glued" together from the start. You could, of course, replicate this in any DAW, but, well, it's just a nice little thing about it. AND. The sounds in it, as well as the stock plugins, sound GREAT.

A thing about EQ's - You really want to get one atleast that is decramped. This will make everything sound better on it. The standard EQ in FL Studio for example, the one with a name like "parametric EQ 2" has a decramping toggle switch. This is great to have. (It alters how it affects the high end quite a bit.)

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Some further insights:

This one is about your journey, or your very own musical career.

A mental model to think about reaching further with your career:

There are different schools of thought out there concerning what to do to launching your music-making career further.

But what every single one that has ever worked has in common is that they will all include ACTION, and RELEASED SONGS.

And so, to hype up THIS aspect, one way to think about it can be to think about each release as inserting fuel into your rocket that is heading to the moon.

The first song is the launching of the rocket into space.

Every other song is like a new "dose" of fuel that takes the rocket further - but the thing is you never know HOW FAR you "get" with each injection of fuel.

But this can actually be a relieving thing: Because you do not ever need to TOTALLY obsess over something getting you ALL THE WAY. Instead you can lean back, and know that each released song will take you SOME distance closer to the "moon".

(The "Moon" might be your idea of success, be it fame, a million streams or x amount of booked gigs in a year.)

What you can KNOW basically is that as long as you are releasing things, you are powering up your rocket to go SOME distance further.

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And the funny thing is that you never know WHICH "injection" of fuel into your rocket will "get you there". Sometimes it might be the injection nr. 32 that "breaks you" into the rock n' roll hall of fame, and sometimes it might be nr. 7.

The funny thing is that you now can if nothing else, remain grounded in the ACTUAL WORK that can get you places basically.

A mind experiment:

Take ALL of the various "shortcut" modalities and "prophecies" that tells you how to get to "fame" or "success" in music - whatever you might consider it be.

And feel into how they feel. They promise things, and make you feel hyped up sometimes too, if they sound good enough.

Now to put all of that in contrast to something else.

We skip that "shortcut miracle" feeling, and just think about and consider somebody, some dude, in ANY FIELD, in ANY INDUSTRY who just continued to show up for work.

And did so for 10 years straight.

Isn't it almost hard to even believe that that dude COULD fail?

To me this has been the most relaxing fact to understand sort of.

Just KNOWING that not only do short-cuts rarely work, but almost by definition they are basically ALWAYS worse, than just *digging in* and thinking it *will* be a bit difficult, and it *will* take some time - it WILL be some amount of grind involved.

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Knowing or at least believing that it does require your feet on the ground, boots in the dirt and getting your hands dirty - probably for a year, two or five or actually an unknown amount of time - can take away all of this "what if" space in your mind that looks for shortcuts all the time basically.

And the funny thing might be that actually, approaching this "no quick fix" mindset, basically always goes much faster than looking for the quick fixes.

If you "knew" that it was hard to make it in music - perhaps you would get "there" much faster".

A bit funny if you think about it like that.

Something that statistics tells us is however that the average amount of released songs all artists have that have "broken" are 32.

So just start grinding out tracks!

BUT.

When you ARE moving - which is the one, single *essential* component for your success.

I think there will be leaps possible to make concerning your success when you simply...

Understand some things about the musical language.

How much easier will it be to "break" if your music sends people into dancing frenzies, hands in the air - than if you got the "MEHHH Trademark" reaction. And this music that "hits" usually follows some patterns. I will teach you these.

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One of the other books from Spark The Music will go even more in-depth into these things that will send your MUSIC into new heights.

But even here, in this book about mainly mixing and production - we will get into some of these things!

1.Chord Feels

The Chord Feels as we call them, most commonly referred to as *Chord Functions* will like basically nothing else set the *emotional landscape* of your song. These are what constitutes your emotional *feel* of your song. And the main pillar ones, the bread and butter ones - are the 1, the 4, the 5 and the 6.

The 2, 3 and 7 are what we call the extra spice, secret sauce Chord Feels - and they can be used to add more nuance and complexity to your chord progressions. But the common misconception is basically this: That the 1, the 4 - the 5 and the 6 Chord Feels are "simple" and "less than".

You do NOT need to go into "weirder" feeling chord feels to get a COMPLETELY BANGER-LEVEL song.

In fact, it's often really just the other way around. The 1, 4, 5 and 6 Chord Feels are actually what speaks the most to us as humans at least when we look at and into western musical tradition. They tell the central universal story of our lives. (More on that in-depth in the other book/books.)

And you can make basically an infinite amount of great sounds that all are very unique basically yeah... using these four Chord Feels. Go with the ones that makes YOU FEEL THE BEST. If the EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE of your song already speaks to people, it will probably be something like 824% easier to get people moving, dancing and RAVING to your song. (As well as yourself)

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2. Rythm

This is what speaks like nothing else to our BODIES. The emotional aspect comes mostly from the Chord Feels, but the rythm is the main element that makes our HEAD NOD. (And your own booty sway.)

Simply locking in with this element of it will make your song, and often in COMBINATION with the Chord Feels - make people (and probably yourself) groove the most. And here, look into *SWING* - this is basically the concept of making some of the sixteenth/eighth notes "drag" a bit. So that they "swing" into the next beat. Instead of being completeley straight - the beat that is - you can make the whole beat SWING much more by adding some elements that contain these "dragging" eight/sixteenth notes. It's just the concept of making some of the notes, that are "off beat" "drag" a bit. And this can very often be toggled on a potentiometre gradually for a whole group on a track so that it contains the exact same amount of SWING. Instead of manually dragging some of the midi-notes for example.

And here, speaking of rythm, let's just add a little snack for you. When working with percussion, consider getting the PITCH of the percussive elements in tune (can also of course include your kick and snare and hi-hats - this is very important for REALLY professional sounding tracks and songs actually) but here we are mainly refering to hand-drum and hits and percussion elements.

Simply getting the hand-drums of percussive things into notes that ring well with the KEY OF THE SONG - will sometimes, along with great, and often simple Chord Feels - and a nice groovy rythmic section in the song - call for that "HIT VIBE" song basically instantly.

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Some hand-drum hits that groove in tunings that ring in tune and key with the key of the song can be just a game-changer - and a really easy one to get working for you.

There will be more on this when we talk some more about arrangement soon. How to utilize rhythm in arrangement with some easy to follow and remember and FEEL - principles. - These are almost like "cheat codes".

3.Melody

Here we will reveal something that might be considered the most powerful "secrets" of a great melody, that really catches on. These things that we can't very easily get out of our head almost, (and do not really want to either probably)

The "secret" of the greatest melodies is not actually the melody in itself, but hearing the SAME NOTES, on top of and over DIFFERNT CHORD FEELS. Just one note for example, played in a percussive way let's say, and nothing changes for a short little while, but the CHORD FEELS *underneath* it changes - will be one of these meodies probably that we just LOVE basically.

We kind of just simply LOVE to hear what the CHORD FEELS, FEEL LIKE, underneath the same notes. We get to hear the notes that often will be the focal point of our attention, the detail that "pops" out, and hear them in a NEW WAY, when the Chord Feels underneath them change.

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And then - To take this further, into something that is more solely about the melody aspect, we often like a certain "call - and - response" pattern. One melody starts in one way, and then it begins again, the very same way, but then the ending of it changes.

And there is a cadence to this. And there are different very prevalent patterns of such nature. Here are some of the most "famous ones".

3 phrases that are exactly identical - but then the 4th one changes as a "response" to the first "call". - This one you will find in countless pop, "HIT" songs if you think about it basically.

"Example" - (pause) Le le le le leh leeeh leh
(pause) Le le le le leh leeeh leh
(pause) Le le le le leh leeeh leh
(pause) Le li lo laa lah leyyy

1 phrase that are one way, and then the second phrase is a bit different but then we go back to the first one again and then into the second one. But the second time the "second phrase" comes in, we change it up a little bit in the ending of it, so that it feels like a "conclusion".

"Example" - Na na na naaaa, nah nah naaaaah, nah nah-naaaaaah.
Na di di diiii di di diii dooooooh.
Na na na naaaa, nah nah naaaaah, nah nah-naaaaaah.
Na di di daaah, di di-daaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh .

The rhythm is basically the same throughout - but the tonality of the notes changes and this we represent here in the examples through the changes in letters. Perhaps it gives you an idea, or a feel for what we are trying to "paint a picture of".

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But to make it (perhaps) even easier to comprehend, you can just think of a person. And sing a little melody about them. If it feels like the melody could be there in a movie - and it would match the vibe of the person and the theme of the movie - then you might have actually without "knowing" what you are doing hit a really great melody - all intuitiveley basically. That can be a little "portal" to get into great melodies for some people to try out.

The general rule however is actually often that the simpler it is, the better. Not as a 100% "working" rule, but often less is more. Work with space and time sometimes rather than complexity of melody. Holding just ONE note, long enough, over the right Chord Feels (often the 1, 4, 5 and 6 Chord Feel) will sometimes FEEL BETTER, and FEEL MORE - than if you go all over the place with a "hunded" different notes. Remember that it's all about feel. And the feel comes from where mostly? The emotional feel anyways - comes mostly from the chord feels and the chord progressions you use them in.

So just FEELING it, with a few, nicley felt notes will often make or great melodies. And you can also do this "hack". Do not look for the meody in itsel as being the main focal point but actually listen "behind" the melody - look for the melody that makes the *music behind it* sound the best. (This hack can actually be used in almost every step of the way, for any part of the mixing and production process - and in music making overall)

When creating a good part for your track let's say - you can listen into whatever makes the REST of the music sound the best.

Sometimes that's a lightning quick and powerful way of finding the VERY BEST lines and parts. Sometimes let's say you might have a pad sound and a simple kick that just sounds so great togetaer, ethereal, nuanced, with so much feeling and vibe. (You just arrive in a movie instantly trough hearing it.)

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(I'm just making an example.)

Now what you can do is simply to listen to whatever new part would make what you ALREADY HAVE - sound MORE like "itself" than what you had already. And if you didn't improve that feeling you had - You probably do not need whatever you added.

So in this example, you might find that a SINGLE word, singing ONE single note, might be what just "clicks" into the vibe you already had with the synthpad and the single kick drum.

THAT PART - that made the entirety feel even better - is the "right one".

Thinking complexity is needed for being "good enough as a musician" is one of these traps that can actually kill a lot of your music making capabilities. Because you might think through thinking that complexity in itself makes you more impressive - it actually might be the case, but it has almost however:

No.

Single.

Correlation.

To good what`?

Good MUSIC.

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Figure this out early. You want to impress people with how amazing your MUSIC SOUNDS AND IS.

Not how technically skilled you are in making "HARD" things.

(That is okay too of course and we do like a drum-solo for example that is just blowing out minds and is technically really difficult and hard to play - the problem some people fall into however is when we confuse technically hard with musically GOOD.)

So this is really just about remaining in the feel for what is the priority. The priority, even for that drummer who played the jaw-breaking - and mind-blowing drum-solo - will of course be to play the SONG the best way possible, for like 95% of it, being the best MUICIAN on the track, rather than the most "shining" technical tradesman. If you switch it up and want to go "difficult and skilled and so people will be impressed" as the priority - you will probably be in "masturbation" territory. And some dudes in the front will of course think: "Whow"... "That dude is just super - talented at playing drums really fast...".

(Or they think man... He just wanted to show off and it was a bit embarrassing how he "ruined" the song so completeley to get approval...)

What however will probably get EVERYBODY vibing with you is when you simply get the priority straight here.

All technical skill is of course to make the MUSIC the best.

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So impress people with your MUSIC - and how GOOD it feel, rather than how HARD it apparently is to play. When that priority is set straight - then you can learn all the technical skills in the world. Because the "hardness" of difficulty level will never "kill" the music. It will instead ACTUALLY BLOW PEOPLES MINDS. And you will be able probably to make music that nobody even could comprehend before. Impress perople with your MUSIC and how GOOD it feels. Not how hard it is to create.

7. Movie-Like Quality

This point might be one of those one-liners that makes you instantly "get it".

If your music inspires feeling as in a movie - YOU'VE GOT IT. Nuff said.

Random fact:

Adding just ONE natural sound—like a human voice or a vocal sample, for example—will make you able to use many nonreal sounds, such as synths, but still the whole thing comes across as natural, unique, and vibrant. Using only samples or such sounds that are more synthetic might sound like something not as good, simply put. This is in the category of production. And this little nugget of info can really give your track something like a doubling in vibe and quality; I'm not kidding. And it goes for real samples as well—you could use just one chopped-up sample in your production, and it will naturally sound SO. MUCH. MORE. UNIQUE. AND. PROFESSIONAL.

But every production will be different.

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The rule might be that SOME natural sounds, or at least that the entirety of the mix sounds ALIVE and BREATHING, is something that we want to listen to by definition, more than when it sounds stale, stagnant and robotic. Even techno needs some breath in it. Even the most electronically produced songs want to have an organic feel to them. Otherwise it sounds well... a bit dead, and lifeless.

This way our overall, entire production will likely sound more unique and stand out. Using only factory sounds—everything quantized perfectly and no real sounds in there—is just often a little bit harder if you want to make something that really stands out. Anything can be done, of course—I'm just pointing to an EASY way of making any production feel more alive and original.

For example, the hip-hop beats that I have made with real samples basically always sound much more "authentic" than the ones I've built using only digital instruments and decent/okay sampled instruments. As soon as just ONE real sample is present, the whole thing usually gets a great upswing in uniqueness. This little nugget of info can really give your track something like a doubling in vibe and quality; I'm not kidding.

Another one-ish-liner: Rhythm that makes your head nod almost by itself—that's a good sign. Pair that with simple chord feels that, in the same natural way, just make you feel good. And you have something that usually will hit the spot.

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And make sure you invest in SOMETHING that you really dig the sound of, and also that you then can get fast and familiar with it. Don't hesitate on getting yourself a soundpack or synth/plugin or whatever it might be if you really feel like you LIKE IT A LOT. These things may end up being in basically every project you make. So it is better to have great sounds that you LOVE when you START each project than to struggle your way "up" from sounds and plugins that you do not really dig all that much.

We keep bombing random interesting facts:

If you learn how to play the guitar, you become a better bass player. If you learn how to play the drums, you will sing better. If you learn how to mix music, you will learn how to write better songs. If you learn how to feel music inside of you and tune out the environments, you will become a better dancer.

This is because all of these things usually work together. And when you have, for example, played the bass and know how a bassist will think about laying down a bassline, for example, then when you pick up a guitar, you will have that in mind and realize MORE about what makes a great GUITAR LINE. So trying out many things might make you better at the things you are NOT doing, even.

Music can have the tendency to lift you to the skies when you feel like you have made something really good, and you can almost get depressed if you've been sitting for a few hours and still nothing has "bit" you. Maybe you even feel like the track you have after three hours is WORSE than your initial feeling, vibe, and idea.

Do not, however, judge everything in those moments. Sometimes we can come back to projects later on and find out that they were, in fact, awesome—we just needed a break.

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Make sure to like something about the environment. It can be where the desk is placed; it can be the right colors on a painting next to you. It could be just a little lamp with a nice colored light. Whatever you like. This helps with the flow state.

Panning: Automating your panning can REALLY create some immersive, interesting effects for your stereo-image in your tracks! It can basically be like a "free ticket" in how to create a soundscape that people go WHOA for. Almost like showing a child a cool new toy. WHOW! THE SOUND... MOVED!???

Okay. Funny (perhaps) way to end this book.

We hope that you've gotten the jist of the most important factors basically connected to mixing!

Stay Groovy!

/Oliver & Spark The Music