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Establishing Your Mix.

By Richard Dolmat

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Now that you've spent hours and days and weeks and months recording your musical masterpieces (and you've also read my article "Tips for a Great Recording Session"), you have arrived at my favorite time in the studio; The Mixdown.

But don't think your job is done yet! The mixdown is just as important as recording. As an artist, you have to approach the mixdown from an artist's point of view and stay on the 'creative' side of the fence where it's still possible to shape and mold your songs throughout the mixdown process.

Remember the old "Yin-Yang" principle which states, "whenever you turn something up, something else disappears. Furthermore; whenever you turn something down, something else gets louder". This applies to EQ, levels and almost anywhere you have two or more tracks.

The Beginning Of The End

STOP!! Don't even think about starting your mixdown on the same day you finish tracking. Take a day off, have a break and then come back refreshed with a new perspective.

Now back to business...

First of all, let's "zero the board". This is simply the action of bringing all the faders to the bottom (–) and centering all the pan knobs and effects sends.

I know what you're thinking, you're thinking "but our mix sounded good when we were tracking!".

OK, but did the mix actually sound good or were you just accustomed to hearing it that way? That's why zero-ing the board is important. It flushes your memory and allows you to start from scratch. It might even be better to mix a song that you finished recording a while back.

1. Get Kicked.

This is where I prefer to start. Other people like to start with the vocals and build around them. But I'm more rhythm based and prefer to start with the kick drum.

One tricky part of any mix is getting a good gain-stage structure where you don't clip the master faders at the end of your mixing session when all your instrument faders are raised. We must be careful to

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keep watching the master bus clipping lights to make sure they never get into the red. Here is why the kick is a good place to start.

Play your songs and watch the master bus VU meters. This is probably the only time you will "mix with your eyes". As you're watching the master VU meter, slowly raise the kick fader until the master meter reads about -7dB . If you are a four piece band, then you can leave the kick there and move on. But if you have a really dense tune, then you may have to lower the kick to -8dB or so (to leave room for all the other instruments as they come up).

Now you are set to mix. The kick should be the only channel that you set levels by watching. Every other channel mixed into the song will be with your ears relative to the kick.

2. Moving On

From now on, it's pretty much a free-for-all. Some people like to move on to the bass next, in order to find the balance for the low-end of the song. Other people like to keep working on the drum kit "as a whole" before moving to other instruments. I prefer to move onto the drum kit over-head mics.

They say that a great drum kit sound can be captured using only two over-head mics, and a kick mic. And it's true. Some of my tunes only use three mics on the final mixed versions, even though we had used up to ten mics for the recording of the kit.

If you placed your over-head mics properly (i.e.: so the snare sounds centered in the stereo image, and not skewed to the left or right speaker) then you will have a better stereo image of the drum kit when the mix is finished. Otherwise you might have to do some fancy panning or EQ to get a balanced image with the drum kit.

You can now bring in the rest of the kit underneath the over heads to fill out the sound. I prefer to leave EQ and effects to the very end of the mix, after all of the instruments are playing. Try to place your toms in the same panning position as the overhead mics recorded them. If your floor tom in the overheads is to the right at 3 o'clock then pan your individual floor tom fader to the same position. And don't forget to check your phase between your mics pointing down and your mics pointing up.

3. Big Bottom

Now I like to add in the bass. Nothing too important here if you have good source audio. I'm also a huge side-chaining fan. I LOVE to side-chain the bass with the kick so the low end frequencies wouldn't fight for space in the mix. It just makes things sound "tighter". Sometimes you may have to eq the lowest of the lows out of the kick in order to make a little more room for the bass to sit in the mix.

4. Pads and More

Here is where I add the "pad" type of sounds. These are sounds that usually have longer sustains and hold the chords of the song. Sounds like strings, sustained electric guitar chords, synth pads, and maybe even some rhythm acoustic guitars are great foundation instruments.

I like to lay these instruments on top of the drums and bass tracks we have already mixed. You can get very creative with the panning of these sounds and create a wide stereo field. This will help make your mix interesting by allowing your lead instruments and vocals sit in the center of your stereo image, attracting attention to themselves.

5. The Vox

Let's finally add the vocals. I usually start off with the lead vocal, and then place all the harmony and

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background vocals underneath the lead. Sometimes, you can end up putting the vocal a little too high in the mix, and a great way to check this is to turn your monitors way down and listen to the mix at an almost inaudible level. This way of listening to your mix will surprise you, but you have to be confident and trust your ears. If something sounds disproportionately loud at this quiet level, then it is too loud. If you must, then you can compress the vocals too, but that really depends on the song's style. Maybe a few fader rides are a better choice than some static compression.

6. The Rest

You can start adding effects and other fancy shmancy things to your tune. Get funky with automating some pan knobs, fade-in some pads etc.. Here is a good time to get creative.

It's also a very good time to actively listen and re-adjust your mix. Is the kick too loud? Should I put some higher frequencies on the bass? Should I compress the backing vocals more? Is the coffee finally ready?

When you feel you have a good mix, burn it to CD and listen to it EVERYWHERE! In the car, in the bath, at home, on the TV set, at your friend's place etc., and make a lot of notes. And at the end, if all your notes cancel out, then you are finished!

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Magic)=====About The Author Richard Dolmat is owner, engineer and producer for the Vancouver based recording studio Digital Sound Magic. Visit his site at: <http://www.digitalsoundmagic.com>

4 Steps to Establishing Good Credit

By James H. Dimmitt

As a consumer you've learned the importance of establishing a good credit rating with your lenders. Whether you are shopping for a new home or auto, or searching for the best deals on insurance, your credit worthiness will be judged by your credit rating or credit score.

A bad credit history or bad credit habits will place "black marks" on your credit profile. These include things such as late payments, having an account assigned to a collection agency, and of course bankruptcy.

Establishing good credit habits and therefore a good credit rating will improve your credit worthiness. This will be reflected in potential lenders offering you substantially lower interest rates and better deals on credit offers.

Here are 4 tips to help you create a shining credit profile:

1) Pay Your Bills On Time

Lenders only have your past payment history on which to decide the type of credit risk you present to them. How you pay off your debts now indicates to them how you will pay off future debts.

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2) Don't Carry Too Many or Too Few Credit Cards

How much is too much ? How little is too little ? Many credit experts and financial planners suggest two to four credit cards is just the right mix.

3) Pay At Least The Minimum Due

Always pay at least the minimum due payment, but never less. And remember, just paying the minimum payment means it will take you years and years to pay off that credit card.

Example: Paying off a \$2,000 credit payment at 18% APR with a minimum monthly payment of 2% (\$40 dollars or less) will take you 30 years to pay off the amount plus interest.

4) Review Your Credit Report Regularly

Monitor your credit report from all three major credit bureaus – Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax – on a regular basis. Check your credit profile at least annually. Review it carefully and make sure that any past mistakes or disputes have been corrected.

Also, if you notice an account listed that you know that you have not personally opened, contact that creditor and the credit bureaus immediately. This could be a sign that you've had your identity stolen. Request to have a fraud alert placed on your profile and account to protect yourself and your credit.

Identity theft is the fastest growing consumer crime in America, with an estimated 1 million people victimized each year.

Establish good credit habits early in life and reap the benefits that your good credit rating will provide you for the rest of your financial future.

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Author: James H. Dimmitt.

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