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Subject: Are you scared?

Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Wed, 02 Mar 2005 17:02:54 GMT

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With the current threads regarding 'loudness' running here and on GM's forum, I've been thinking about the 'level wars' as well as the bigger picture - what's wrong with the industry? I think the two are related, lemme explain...

As usual, this will take some background and will likely involve much meandering, as I generally jot stuff like this down sort of stream-of-consciousness...

Anyway, to figure out what's gone wrong, I tend to look back at history and examine what worked and what didn't. Loudness has been an issue since music began being recorded as a business, frankly - many old-timers will regale us with tales of how they worked to cut records hotter than the next label. Loudness isn't a new issue and it will always be with us, but we have tools now that allow greater destruction of music than ever before, and many seem to be quite cavalier in exercising this new power. But what's different about today? Is the industry full of brave souls daring to do to music what no ever dared before?

No. Not even close.

I believe the industry is full of fear - immobilizing fear that stems from thinking that rocking the boat will result in one losing one's 'safe spot'. So many people are making so much money now they dare not do anything different, daring, cutting edge, and this problem starts at the top (labels) and trickles down through the artists, producers, engineers. Think back 30 years ago and you have bands that really knew how to play their instruments, really knew how to perform, and really wished to change the status quo. All you have to do is look at bands like Pink Floyd or Led Zeppelin - bands that did things differently than what everyone else was doing, had a definable sound, and had legions of fans. By now you might be thinking I'm blaming the bands, but I'm not. Bands are really just doing what it takes to achieve the dream. Do you think a A&R guy ever told Zep, "great record, but I don't hear a hit..."?

As stated above, the problem starts at the top, the labels. Over the years, the glutton attitude of gobbling up as much of the market as possible has created an environment where you have inexperienced people all over the place in A&R. The cost of producing an album, while peaking years ago, is still extremely high once you roll promotion into it (including the \$500k videos and such), so the labels are scared. No one is willing to take a chance because if it bombs, they're fired. So they stay 'safe', rehashing the same crap over and over. And as this happens, people

lose interest and sales drop. So they labels get more scared, become more homogeneous (chasing the last 'big hit'), and sales drop even more. Music loses it's perceived value among the buyers, downloads increase, purchases decrease, and the vicious cycle continues spiraling downward...

But it's not just the labels, it's us too - the production people. There was a time when producers, engineers, mixers and masterers (PEMM) worked really hard to make the audio sound good. I know, it's hard to believe, but that's actually what history shows us - PEMM's used to care how records sounded. They cared enough to fight and claw when someone suggested corners be cut, or that principles be compromised. Not so anymore, in general. There are still a few who aren't scared.

Now, let's get this straight once and for all - I am in no way suggesting that an artist should be told their view of their art is wrong. I feel like our job is to help them achieve their goals. It's the label's job to reject their view of what their art should sound like, not ours - the labels are ultimately the ones dropping the ball here - they have the power to refuse releasing terrible sounding records as they're paying the bills. I cut obscenely loud records from time to time to please artists, but in those cases it's always after a revision to turn it up that loud - the first ref they get is as what I consider to be a sensible level.

Anyway, we can sit around pointing fingers at the faceless labels all day, but that will get us nowhere and I 'm quite sure they wouldn't listen anyway. If we want to change the industry, it has to be a grass roots movement. The 'a-list' engineers don't want to rock the boat - they're making money hand over fist and have no trouble sleeping at night. It's going to have to be us revolting against the ever-lowering acceptable level of sound quality. But that takes guts - are you willing to lose a client because you take the time to teach them what's going to happen to their record as it's played on the radio? Are you willing to lose a gig for calling out the producer for requesting it be louder because the latest hit as louder? These questions are hypothetical, sure. Some people won't be talked down, and if you approach it wrong, you'll certainly lose the client...

We complain all the time, but sitting here whining to each other about will accomplish nothing.

Do you think you can single-handedly change the industry, given time? I do.

Are you willing to lay it on the line, pissing-off your colleagues for calling a spade a spade and trying to remind people what good sound is? I am.

Are you in this because you appreciate great music, or are you simply in it for the paycheck? I'm

in it for the great music.

Are you scared?

I'm not.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [MoreSpaceEcho](#) on Wed, 02 Mar 2005 18:04:53 GMT

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Hi Brad,

nice post, i think you summed things up really well. i'm at the very bottom of the totem pole, i'm one of those dreaded bedroom mastering guys with a pc and plugins, but apparently i'm not screwing up people's records too bad cause they come back, so that's good.

anyway, i'm definitely not afraid. this is of course easy for me to say as my livelihood doesn't depend on income from mastering, and i understand that people have to eat and do what the clients want. but i rant and rave all the time to anyone who will listen about records being way too loud and how these records are going to sound really, really stupid in a couple years.

i always cut things at a reasonable level, and haven't yet had anyone ask me to crush something. if they did, i'd send them to this other guy in town who destroys everything he touches. the relatively small amount of money i'd lose by not taking the gig is no big deal to me (though i sure could use it!) and i'd rather just keep my rep \*cough\* as the 'audiophile guy'.

i have had a couple projects where i gave them the ref and they said "it sounds great. can you make it louder?" and i told them i could but it wouldn't sound as good, and they trusted me and went with the quiet, good sounding one.

i just met with a new client last night, i brought up the loudness issue, they said "oh yeah, we don't care about that. the levels of the other stuff you've done is fine." hooray!

my whole thing is...when i put in a superloud cd, invariably the first thing i do is turn the volume down. when i put in a sensibly mastered cd, usually i turn the volume up. and i think turning the volume up is much more affirmative, you know? isn't that what rock music is supposed to make you want to do? anyway, i think we should all start the Quiet Records Coalition.

cheers,  
scott craggs

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [Samc](#) on Wed, 02 Mar 2005 21:06:34 GMT  
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"Anyway, we can sit around pointing fingers at the faceless labels all day, but that will get us nowhere and I 'm quite sure they wouldn't listen anyway. If we want to change the industry, it has to be a grass roots movement. The 'a-list' engineers don't want to rock the boat - they're making money hand over fist and have no trouble sleeping at night. It's going to have to be us revolting against the ever-lowering acceptable level of sound quality. But that takes guts - are you willing to lose a client because you take the time to teach them what's going to happen to their record as it's played on the radio? Are you willing to lose a gig for calling out the producer for requesting it be louder because the latest hit as louder? These questions are hypothetical, sure. Some people won't be talked down, and if you approach it wrong, you'll certainly lose the client..."

This is certainly the sensible way to reverse this trend. Without dogma, enforcement or restricting artistic freedom. And it certainly doesn't provide a soapbox for just a few well known personalaties who might see it as an opportunity to benefit from the movement.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [Bob Olhsson](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 04:02:51 GMT  
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bblackwood wrote on Wed, 02 March 2005 11:02  
Do you think you can single-handedly change the industry, given time? I do.I decided to devote the rest of my life to this a few years ago. Where I differ from your view a little is that I think the top is reflecting the bottom as much as the other way around. It all needs to be rebuilt much as it was in the late 1940s. Surprisingly few people were needed then and I'm sure it's no different today. What we actually do is pretty simple, we connect people with music. It's all of the posing and hype that gets in the way. It's just going to take a touch of leadership to support the people inside the industry who really care. I know for a fact that there are a lot of them.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [MASSIVE Mastering](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 04:29:02 GMT

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I'm with - Well, everybody on this one.

I try to burn at a "nice" level - I hate to even admit that I try to find the level "where it starts to sound worse" as opposed to just "finding a good level" but there is the pressure...

I had a redo last week - Same thing - "Sounds great, but it's so quiet" (at -10dB RMS).

No, they wanted it above -8 like the (whatever that crappy recording they sent along) sounded like.

So, "under protest" I cut the lows, and pummeled it through the garden. I thought it sounded horrible, and let them know that it was on the way. They loved it. It didn't sound anything like the original mixes. Thin, crushed, harsh... Ruins my mood, my day and what little faith I have left that this will end some time soon...

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [TurtleTone](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 05:34:26 GMT

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I think history makes everything smell a little better. Bands that rise to the top and stay are the exception to the rule. For every Pink Floyd, there were 1000 others that sucked. Volume is a problem, but no more of a problem than others in the past. I'm sure guys used to complain that certain records used to make the needle jump and say where is this going. High end used to be a problem that everyone tried to overcome, now it's not. If it isn't volume, then it would be something else. Bands want to stand out from the rest and right now it's volume. Some want 25 songs on a CD. Some want multichannel. It's always going to be something. If you take away the Russians, there are 25 Middle Easterners waiting in the wings.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [jfrigo](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 05:37:46 GMT

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I'm thinking we need to get the up and coming artists and producers to understand. Maybe the next generation of artists can be better informed and that will help. Also, youth and rock 'n' roll wants to rebel - how do we encourage them to rebel against cookie-cutter crappy sounding records?

Like Brad says - the guys at the top of this pyramid aren't going to rock their golden boat, so we need to get at tomorrow's top guys now. Those are the people to influence, and the people we have access to, so there's a start.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucy](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 15:27:44 GMT

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I've stated the idea pretty clearly that Fear vs. Love, or Intention vs. Happenstance is the timeless battle of humanity and that bitching from the cheap seats is not enough.

The loudness wars mirror everything in the modern economy/society. The issue of fear and group think today is pandemic. Yet fear is not new, it's just easier now. The new things in this era are:

- a) the advanced (ever more competitive) capitalist economy
- b) the advanced democracy (which has been rolled into a corporate/military/industrial/payola state as in no time in the past)
- c) the advanced communication/information age, which makes quick hitting ideas stronger (easier to spread) than deep and complete ideas.

Mastering content: Loudness is a quick idea ... dynamics is a deep and complete idea.  
Cooperation between peers is non-competitive and not encouraged.

As for Fear, the human being has always been the same, some of us are stronger while some are weaker, some are bright while some are slower. We never change throughout time, yet the environment we live in does.

Now it's changed and is changing BIG time, it's a new world in many ways. The competition of capitalism gets tougher every day by definition, and this is a situation that acerbates the fear and inhibits education, need or desire for thinking outside the box or challenging/questioning authority

or power structures. Why bother? The easy money and social acceptance is with the lemmings and the excuses.

Why are Americans increasingly Republican at the same time that PAC money has taken over Washington DC and corporations have become economically and politically dominant? Because alignment with money and power is the easiest way to survive financially and socially in a supremely competitive democracy and an expanding global economy. Humans have always been lazy on the whole, but now the stakes and repercussions are greater and more obvious.

(Americans in particular are walking a tightrope that's even higher, as we are about to fall from our position as the most powerful people in the world, in this lifetime ... and our ever increasing national debt is owned by Asia, as well. We are living in a bubble of denial. Mastering content: So are the Mafia.)

Everything is more obvious and heightened in this era, but it's more of the same. It's an exciting time to live if we have the patience to watch all the failures and corruptions on love based on fear.

Yes, we all need to decide to be leaders or followers, afraid or courageous, trend setters or trend followers ... now more than ever in history because the advanced nature of our economic and political (communication/information) age is making everything move toward convenience, toward fear, and away from progressive ideas or individual thought. These require will and provoke change and in this high paced economy that's more scary than ever. Habit and fear and greed and the "Devils" motivations are more likely than ever, but these are not new. Most religions in the West define "good" vs. "evil" in the way that we would define "love" vs. "fear" or "appropriate dynamics" vs. "habitual slamming"

As said, a power structure of our own on loudness, a formal paper from a group of accepted leaders, is the only way to balance the inevitable human nature qualities and the era of competition and technology we live in. These are tough times in every way, but we are fortunate to be here and to have each other, and if we cooperate it will help stem the tides (or fear and other lower emotions) that for all time were present, yet now are more potent (due to advanced technology), more obvious (due to increased communication technology) and more dangerous (based on the ever more competitive capitalism economy).

Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Bob Olhsson](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 15:52:55 GMT

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The new thing is that this is the first time there has been a shrinking market for music in 50+ years.

This means musical and recording quality both need to become much more compelling for music to survive beyond just being a minor subset of television broadcasting or a souvenir such as a tee shirt.

The good news is that a single artist could turn the whole thing around as has happened before. I see our challenge as being to create the fertile ground for that artist and a new generation of managers, promoters and record labels to grow from. Creativity in all of these areas desperately needs a restart!

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucy](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 16:09:08 GMT

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Bob Olhsson wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 10:52The new thing is that this is the first time there has been a shrinking market for music in 50+ years.

Sales in the UK are up. Sales for independent labels are way up.

They have embraced more thoughtful music, and are looking for timelessness, not the trendy pop crap which has poisoned the majors and the consumers.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [chrisj](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 16:50:20 GMT

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I've been saying that hot mastering kills longterm sales, and I'm sticking to it. I know it's a controversial topic to suggest that a CD won't keep on selling year after year if the sound hurts you, but that's the way it is.

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I'm working on an even more outrageous extension of this idea involving further arcane metering voodoo... as near as I can tell, there are lots of ways to make sound ugly and excessive, but the only one that helps you with longterm sales is if you have excessive crest factor, because there's a correlation between exceptional performance and peak energy going way beyond RMS. People find that ugly too, sometimes, but it sells over the long haul.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [malice](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 17:03:03 GMT

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lucey wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 17:09Bob Olhsson wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 10:52The new thing is that this is the first time there has been a shrinking market for music in 50+ years.

Sales in the UK are up. Sales for independent labels are way up.

Yes, bust starting back from where ??????

malice

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucey](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 17:23:23 GMT

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malice wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 12:03lucey wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 17:09Bob Olhsson wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 10:52The new thing is that this is the first time there has been a shrinking market for music in 50+ years.

Sales in the UK are up. Sales for independent labels are way up.

Yes, bust starting back from where ??????

malice

Since they decided to go for long term and music driven over short term and image driven.

ProTools edited music and Video driven music are no different than Loudness in mastering, it's all a flip of the priorities with changing technology and low emotions driving the cart, instead of using will and choice with the new technology.

The hard work of finding, recording honestly at reasonable volumes, and selling great artists is too hard for most when the easy work of making attractive people sound better and louder than was previously possible is available.

Even Al Schmidt said that with DAW editing and new technology they are MAKING artists, not finding them. These created products are sonic widgets that fill a predetermined niche, not musical creators who will change the world by their very presence in it. And with the assassinations of real people this century (MLK, John Lennon, Malcom X, etc.) it makes sense for the artist's to hide behind other professions in many cases. Fear again.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [malice](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 17:30:36 GMT

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I hear you Brian,

I was just bringing your attention over the fact that the crisis was more severe in UK and sales were down for a longer time than US. I remember at some point that you could be in "Top of the pop" with less than 5000 record sales ...

Making progress from this situation is not an achievement and cannot be considerer YET as a turnover ...

malice

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Bob Olhsson](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 17:52:28 GMT

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It would be very interesting to see figures on new music sales that exclude catalog sales over the past 20 years.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucy](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 17:59:30 GMT

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malice wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 12:30

Making progress from this situation is not an achievement and cannot be considered YET as a turnover ...

malice

Well, short term or long term, the simple change in thought is huge.

The intention has changed, and the will is there.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [JGreenslade](#) on Thu, 03 Mar 2005 18:00:58 GMT

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The situation in the UK industry is because things couldn't get any worse. I believe the term city-types would use is a "dead cat bounce".

A friend of mine made No.8 in the UK charts a few months ago. Guess how many they sold?

15,000...

The MCPS put their rates up recently, for the 1st time in 30 years. They lost 3 million pounds in the previous period...

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(Mechanical Copyright Protection Service)

Back to topic:

As I commented in another loudness thread, an associate (non audio person, a photographer) told me about a dynamics plug-in he uses to subjectively improve MP3s. If dynamics processing / presets start appearing in consumer gear maybe that could take away some of the pressure to pancake?

I also feel that the loudness war has been around for many years (a lecture I attended last Dec illustrated late '30s recordings that were squashed), and a big part of the problem is the fact that it is being perpetuated by unskilled people, with digital hardware, as opposed to skilled AEs with analogue hardware. Now anyone can squash a recording without having to comprehend the underlying theory...

Justin

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [robk](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 08:41:49 GMT

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thermionic wrote on Thu, 03 March 2005 18:00The situation in the UK industry is because things couldn't get any worse. I believe the term city-types would use is a "dead cat bounce".

A friend of mine made No.8 in the UK charts a few months ago. Guess how many they sold?

15,000...

Most people I know in the UK who are buying music do so from CD-WOW or PLAY.com, based in Hong Kong or Channel Islands - through the letter-box in a few days for several UK Pounds less than High St is a no-brainer for many people (including my 2 sons). These sales will not show up in UK figures.

I would buy music if there was music to buy. Sales figures do not describe the latent demand for paid-for music, only how many people are happy with what is made available to them. For me the quality of sound is a large part of this - there are very few recent CDs that I can bear to listen to over and over at the moment.

Rob Kirkwood  
www.visibleform.co.uk

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 10:25:56 GMT  
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Good to see the discusion thus far.

After mulling over this for years now, the only solution I can come up with is every single person deciding they are simply sick of it and doing what they can to change things. It will take time, and there's no guarantee of winning this battle, but I will not simply cave in.

The side effect of it is that by developing a reputation for being one who cuts sensibly but is willing and able to push it when the clients asks is that, ime, you really become the mastering engineer people want (in a general sense) - you are cutting records to sound good, but are not above doing something over the top for the client if that is their wish.

And since I have the choice, I'd rather be known as a guy who tries to make things sound good by default than as a guy that tries to make things loud by default...

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [JGreenslade](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 10:35:16 GMT  
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Quote:

I would buy music if there was music to buy. Sales figures do not describe the latent demand for paid-for music, only how many people are happy with what is made available to them. For me the quality of sound is a large part of this - there are very few recent CDs that I can bear to listen to over and over at the moment.

Agreed. On one hand I have noticed music / hi-fi buffs sneering down their noses at "audio engineers" because of the loudness / distortion race (the loudness race has devalued the

currency of "audio engineer" in many people's eyes, a predicament I find moderately depressing), but at the same time certain factions who should know better don't seem to give a fig...(next para) Many of my friends spend their time buying old records off specialist dealers, and have become close-minded and won't even entertain the concept that there could be decent new material about - maybe it's post-traumatic-stress-disorder induced from other new recordings...

I wasn't going to name the companies, but I will, what the hell: When I attended the Heathrow A/V Expo last September I was amazed and flabbergasted at the standard of material being used to demo the kit. The 2 firms that stand out in my mind were Naim and DCS... Some of the material I heard in the Naim room (the only firm at the show who'd bothered to set up any acoustic treatment) was beyond description in terms of limited dynamic range, it sounded akin to FM radio - how can a hi-fi OEM demo their kit with flat-lined recordings? Why make all that effort with the power-supplies? I'm amazed...

However, Naim's source material had nothing on DCS... When I was sitting in the DCS suite, no lie, I just wanted to verbally abuse the staff. I heard the most brittle, over-compressed material I think I've ever heard. I would wager a bet that a skilled AE with a Fostex Portastudio could have made a cleaner, more natural recording than what I heard.

I find it acutely concerning that 2 major players in the hi-fi market (and pro market in DCS's case) would choose such heinously mangled material to demo their hardware - I still can't figure it out today. I came that close to standing up in the DCS demo and shouting to the staff "how the f\*ck can anyone evaluate this hardware if you choose source material with 5% odd-order distortion on the whole mix?". I feel like I chickened-out really, maybe I should have caused a scene...

Excuse the rant.

Justin

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [malice](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 16:38:24 GMT  
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bblackwood wrote on Fri, 04 March 2005 11:25 Good to see the discussion thus far.

After mulling over this for years now, the only solution I can come up with is every single person deciding they are simply sick of it and doing what they can to change things. It will take time, and

there's no guarantee of winning this battle, but I will not simply cave in.

The side effect of it is that by developing a reputation for being one who cuts sensibly but is willing and able to push it when the clients asks is that, ime, you really become the mastering engineer people want (in a general sense) - you are cutting records to sound good, but are not above doing something over the top for the client if that is their wish.

And since I have the choice, I'd rather be known as a guy who tries t make things sound good by default than as a guy that tries to make things loud by default...

I think the good attitude is to refuse to pass a certain level. I mean, you have to tell your client : "now we are crossing the Rubicon, things will start to sound worse than what we have. Do you want a good sounding record or a stupidly loud sounding record: cause if you want louder than that, I would prefer you don't mention my name as the guy who mastered it..."

Do you think you would loose clients with this kind of attitude ?

malice

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [chrisj](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 17:17:25 GMT

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I think the only real refuge is being able to produce output that sounds SO BIG, so intensely awesome and right, that it changes the context of the question. You cannot have both at once- sound doesn't care if you need the output to be louder for A&R, you'll be losing something.

I'm working on dither software for the attention of Bruno Putzeys- he's got some hardware-manufacturing thing going on (Grimm Audio) and was checking in with how my code sounded and it turned out to be kind of synergistic. He's got me using more normal requirements like real dither instead of science project, and I've got him saying in certain ways I've beat MegaBitMax 'significantly' (less tonal change than it). My point being...

I was working on a way to skip the dither and do it all with noise shaping, and ironically I pretty much nailed it... I've got a test file produced from the 24/96.net dither shootout sources, that fades, INCLUDING ADDED NOISE, smoothly below the LSB boundary. It sputters a bit. It sounds rather weird. But it fades UNDER the truncation boundary, goes smoothly right through that

boundary without any particular 'break', and without any apparent background noise much less dither noise. Sounds like some sort of insane FM synth or something. The volume output really closely tracks the high-res version. If you null it, the NULL fades to silence too. I would have said that was impossible.

Sound doesn't care how clever this is. I tested it on actual music content, and the sound SUCKED. Convinced me to just go with the variations that have dither linearizing the system, and a kind of invariant background noise, which sounded great.

Sound doesn't care if you need to have hotter output, either. If the sound sucks, the sound sucks. It is possible to hear if the sound sucks. It's not possible to demonstrate this and also have the hotter output at the same time. I think the trick will be contriving to have the sound really big, deep, rich, since the smashed stuff does sound really small, shallow, cheap.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Plush](#) on Fri, 04 Mar 2005 18:20:37 GMT

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No, certainly not scared at all.

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Subject: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Sat, 05 Mar 2005 11:46:28 GMT

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I GIVE PERMISSION FOR THIS POST TO BE FREELY COPIED THROUGHOUT THE INTERNET AND/OR WRITTEN PUBLICATIONS, AS LONG AS THE NOTICE: "COPYRIGHT 2005 BY ROBERT A. KATZ" IS ATTACHED TO THE TEXT.

Medical schools require that their graduating physicians take a hippocratic oath. You can read the original medical oath here .

I'd like to propose (and sign as the first signer) the following MASTERING ENGINEER'S

HIPPOCRATIC OATH. I propose that this oath be delivered and taken at all the audio schools and retroactively by all working mastering engineers:

I swear that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant:

To be a loyal and respectful professional colleague with all who have taught me my art and to help teach them this art - if they desire to learn it; to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my professional colleagues and students who have signed the covenant and have taken the oath, and furthermore, to help my colleagues who have not yet taken or abided by this oath.

I will apply corrective audio measures for the benefit of the sound and performance of the music and other sound which have been given to me to process, according to my ability and best judgment; I pledge not to do the sound harm or injustice, either through commission or omission of any act.

I will not give a bad-sounding product to any client or anybody who (knowingly or unknowingly) asked for one, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. I will make every effort to instruct anybody who asks for a bad-sounding product the reasons why this product is or will be bad-sounding, and to show them how the product can be bettered by using more effective or different processing techniques. If the client continues to prefer a different result which I know to be bad-sounding, I will reluctantly deliver the product to them in as good a condition as I can make it within their proposed limitations. I will make it known to them, as tactfully as possible, that their choice has not been good in my professional opinion.

I will not use severely damaging processes on any audio product. I recognize that the definition of "damage" is in the ear of the listener, but that long experience and ear training help us to distinguish that which is harm from good. To that end I will make every effort to improve my abilities and knowledge, to truthfully say, "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better."

Whatever houses I may visit to do my work, I will come for the benefit of the music and sound, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief.

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Signed,

Robert A. Katz, Mastering engineer

All those who wish to sign and uphold this oath as I have chosen to do, please register your signature by sending it to Bob Katz through the guestbook at [www.digido.com](http://www.digido.com) and I will publish your names and signatures at [digido.com](http://digido.com) as signatories to this new Hippocratic oath.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [Bob Olhsson](#) on Sat, 05 Mar 2005 14:36:03 GMT  
[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

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Sometimes I wish we had no technology other than microphones and recorders. Most music seems to be drowning in technology today!

Imagine if people were treating sex this way...

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [dcollins](#) on Sun, 06 Mar 2005 04:44:28 GMT  
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Bob, let me be the first to complement you on this treatise.

I never thought you had such a developed sense of humor, but this may prove me wrong!

Granted, I've heard some bad mastering in my life, but nobody died from it.

Cox-2 is not L2, for you art majors out there....

DC

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?

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Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Sun, 06 Mar 2005 15:09:45 GMT  
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---

dcollins wrote on Sat, 05 March 2005 23:44Bob, let me be the first to complement you on this treatise.

I never thought you had such a developed sense of humor, but this may prove me wrong!

Granted, I've heard some bad mastering in my life, but nobody died from it.

Nobody died laughing, either, but there are some pretty serious comedians who care about their work. I don't expect any clowns to sign this oath, but a number of serious comedians are welcome to join in and sign. The oath was intended to separate those who care about audio and are concerned about the products they make from those who don't shive a git. It us no coincidence that this oath has been placed in the same subject area where Brad is disgusting (discussing) the "Mastering Mafia".

Actually, this oath was intended to be taken quite seriously. There's nothing in it that any dedicated engineer would have an objection to. If the schools and universities imparted this kind of an attitude on their students... Likewise, if people take this oath on its face value, I dream that it's a step closer to the concept of a "Mastering Engineer's Guild" that people have been dreaming about in one way or another. Hippocrates talked about his fellow physicians sharing their knowledge... There are lifelong goals expressed in that oath which are more than just "good words to live by".

By all means, have a beer on me, and then sober up, read my intent and think about it again.

How many of you reading this oath believed it was a joke?

BK

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Level](#) on Sun, 06 Mar 2005 17:32:35 GMT

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If I have learned anything, I have learned that Bob Katz don't Bluff. Neither do I.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Samc](#) on Sun, 06 Mar 2005 19:33:30 GMT

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Why do so many of these post regarding this subject have PANIC written all over them? While this is certainly an important topic of discussion, I cannot for the life of me understand the need to sign petitions, oaths and pledges. I sometimes have the feeling that I'm reading about some new threat to humanity that's breathing down our necks. I don't know when, but I'm willing to wager that THIS FAD WILL GO AWAY eventually, just like the too much reverb fad did!

Music will not die, it will not go away, it will no disappear, and it does not need the aid of super heroes (certainly not because of this trend).....There is no need to panic.

By the way, the art and science of producing music is always evolving, the imagination of artist, audio engineers, and equipment designers are always pushing the boundaries. The economics of the music business and fashion trends are also two important factors in popular music, and while this particular trend is certainly prevalent in the various forms of popular music, there is a whole other world of music outside the confines of Clear Channel, Billboard and MTV that does not necessarily subscribe to the latest fashion.

As long as some clients, (whom ever they are) demand, and/or sign off on smashed records, there will be an engineer to smash those records for them. However, when clients do not demand, and/or will not sign off on smashed records..... guess what happens? Just keep working in the way you think is best for you, your clients and the music, the really good stuff always outlast the rest.

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Sun, 06 Mar 2005 20:21:20 GMT

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dcollins wrote on Sat, 05 March 2005 23:44

Granted, I've heard some bad mastering in my life, but nobody died from it.

Nobody died, but a lot of people are getting SICK of it! :)

BK

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [dcollins](#) on Mon, 07 Mar 2005 05:22:34 GMT  
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bobkatz wrote on Sat, 05 March 2005 03:46

I will apply corrective audio measures for the benefit of the sound and performance of the music and other sound which have been given to me to process, according to my ability and best judgment; I pledge not to do the sound harm or injustice, either through commission or omission of any act.

Obvious error #1, and why I thought you were kidding in the first place....

Music is subjective!

Calling processing "harm" or "injustice" etc., seems like you are talking murder here, not art!

Who are you to say what's right?

I think BK has a "hubris" that likes to claim absolutes for audio where none can really exist.....

From monitor "standards" to "I can hear the 92 from the 93" you present a doctrine of "If it's not K-something you can't possibly like it."

Basically "Bob can hear something that I can't."

Why is that?

Is it really true?

Quote:

I will not give a bad-sounding product to any client or anybody who (knowingly or unknowingly) asked for one, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. I will make every effort to instruct anybody who asks for a bad-sounding product the reasons why this product is or will be bad-sounding, and to show them how the product can be bettered by using more effective or different processing techniques. If the client continues to prefer a different result which I know to be bad-sounding, I will reluctantly deliver the product to them in as good a condition as I can make it within their proposed limitations. I will make it known to them, as tactfully as possible, that their choice has not been good in my professional opinion.

You can use the term "bad-sounding" one hundred times per paragraph and it adds exactly zero to our discussion here.....

Quote:

I will not use severely damaging processes on any audio product.

This would be my executive summary of why your post IS a joke, assuming you were actually being serious. Back to point #1, really.

Quote:

I recognize that the definition of "damage" is in the ear of the listener, but that long experience and ear training help us to distinguish that which is harm from good. To that end I will make every effort to improve my abilities and knowledge, to truthfully say, "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better."

So how does Bob Katz, Mastering Engineer and have I mentioned author, propose to describe what is "severly damaging processing?"

How do you tell the client that he isn't happy?

Quote:

Whatever houses I may visit to do my work, I will come for the benefit of the music and sound, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief.

See what I mean about logrolling?

And mischief? That's one of my specialties, but Bob wants to ban it.....

Quote:

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Not buying it. Well, the fame part, maybe.

And art, well that's why I'm here!

DC

---

Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Mon, 07 Mar 2005 20:48:36 GMT  
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dcollins wrote on Mon, 07 March 2005 00:22bobkatz wrote on Sat, 05 March 2005 03:46  
I will apply corrective audio measures for the benefit of the sound and performance of the music and other sound which have been given to me to process, according to my ability and best judgment; I pledge not to do the sound harm or injustice, either through commission or omission of any act.

Obvious error #1, and why I thought you were kidding in the first place....

Music is subjective!

You sure can be a pain in the ass, DC; you would find shit under a plate on the dinner table because you want to be one. You ought to take the oath at its face value, which is a basic desire to help impart some ethics, values and collaboration amongst your fellow men.

This oath is both EVERYTHING and NOTHING. First it is NOTHING because nothing is defined---this is on purpose BECAUSE of the subjective nature of the very work we do. It should be obvious to your logic-impaired brain that the very subjectivity of the work we do imposed the language of the oath. Instead, you chose to criticise it by a) bringing up the OBVIOUS and b) not realizing the deeper meaning and intent.

NOTHING is defined---because the very work we do is subjective and variable. But at the same time the oath is EVERYTHING because it recognizes that there should be integrity and ethical purpose to our work. The oath asks all of us to speak up and not be silent when we feel we are "damaging" the sound in our own definition of "damage"; the oath covers the definition of "damage" as personal, yet also based on long-term experience and ear-training.

Have you ever "damaged" a piece of audio (in your definition of "damage") by the requests of a client? Have you not spoken up about it to the client or did you remain silent? Substitute your own term for the word "damage" if you don't like it, "smashed", "hypercompressed without sensitivity to the material", whatever you prefer.

One of the purpose of the oath is to urge us to speak up to the client and not remain silent when we feel that "damage" is being done to the material. Educating the client is part of the solution to the problem of bad mastering. If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

-----

As for your remarks about the K-System, some people get it, some people understand its variability, and others, like you, get a thing up their ass because they think it's trying to limit you to some arbitrary series of numbers. Your cynicism should be replaced by a spirit of collaboration. I may like my cars red and you may like them blue, but the common ground is a system of defining what the colors are and how they work. Hundreds of engineers around the world seem to be getting it, kid.

Quote:

I think BK has a "hubris" that likes to claim absolutes for audio where none can really exist.....

Only if you try to twist my words into your own version of what you think they say. There is some very real learning that can come from knowledge of how monitor gains interrelate with peak to average ratios, and how calibrated monitor gains work, the basis for the K-System. The other day I watched a movie with an excellent rock recording used as part of the soundtrack. It was reproduced at a good level, about 83 dB average to my guess, and it had plenty of clean transients. Knowing the standard calibrated theatrical monitor gain, I could easily conclude that this had to be a special music mix for the large theatre. I didn't need any meters to tell me. So there is a lot more to this system than simply talking about arbitrary meter readings; it is a POWERFUL system that allows you to learn something about the music recording simply by observing the monitor attenuator and listening!

Quote:

From monitor "standards" to "I can hear the 92 from the 93" you present a doctrine of "If it's not K-something you can't possibly like it."

I've never said or implied that. I've talked about a scale of diminishing returns and it's illustrated in the honor roll. The only thing "absolute" about the system is the implication that "somewhere down there on the scale you will find something that you are not going to like." The point being that all responsible engineers realize that having a scale of measurement is the first way to help separate order from chaos. And I maintain that a situation where you can put in 10 different pop CDs made from 1980 through 2005 and they differ by as much as 14 dB in loudness is genuine CHAOS. Here are some quotes from the articles that you like to call "absolute":

"I hope that engineers will return to using compression as an esthetic device instead of trying to win the loudness race."

"The K-System can become the lingua franca of interchange within the industry, avoiding the current problem where different mix engineers work on parts of an album to different standards of loudness and compression."

"Even with slight deviations from the recommended practice, the music world will be far more consistent than the current chaos. Everyone should know the monitor gain they like to use."

"While practicing engineers may disagree as to the absolute point where the sound goes downhill, we all agree that point is definable."

I believe that point begins where the esthetic desires of the compression are overtaken by the loudness race, where the desire to "make it loud" next to another CD supercedes the esthetic requirements of the recording itself. Do you see any numbers there?

"This leads us to my K-System Proposal, a metering and monitoring standard that integrates the best concepts of the past with current knowledge in order to avoid the chaos of the last 20 years. It also develops a common language of levels, so that engineers can properly communicate."

So please quit with the b.s. and stop trying to put words in my mouth that I have not said or feelings that I have not expressed, feelings which have been echoed by so many of our colleagues in so many other manners on this very forum. Do you see the words "absolute requirement for an RMS" anywhere in this letter :)?

And please don't try to pick a quote out of context from my article(s) that appears to contradict what I'm saying here, because the whole is greater than any part taken out of context. And your spirit of collaboration should be as large as your own hubris. Oh, excuse me, sorry, I wasn't being collaborative in that last sentence.

Once again, if you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. In a world with no definitions, there is only chaos.

BK

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Mon, 07 Mar 2005 21:34:05 GMT  
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P.S., based on the positive responses I've gotten in emails about this, and the occasional negative comments I've seen on this board, I'd have to say that if this oath doesn't "make it", it will be because of hypocrites, not because of Hipocrates!

---

Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [natpub](#) on Tue, 08 Mar 2005 03:06:55 GMT

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bblackwood wrote on Fri, 04 March 2005 04:25...there's no guarantee of winning this battle, but I will simply not cave in...

bblackwood wrote on Wed, 02 March 2005 11:02...I cut obscenely loud records from time to time to please artists...

????

This isnt my forum, Im just a musician in a band.

But, from reading your original topic post, I disagree Brad: You see, unlike you, I WOULD blame the bands. Not the labels, consumers, MP3 downloaders, nor the PEMM's.

I can (and often do) have producers, managers, investors, and AR guys all giving me all kinds of pressure to do this or that. But if I cave-in as the artist and let some piece of garbage be put out with MY NAME on it, then I am the one responsible.

Ya'll's area is one part of things, and you can try to educate your artists; but that's about it--the rest is up to them.

While one can argue that every phase of the industry shares part of the responsibility to make a quality record, the buck has to stop somewhere, and IMO that is most definately the artist.

While one could argue that the money people at the top decide what gets put out, I would observe that I have never seen that to really be the case. The people decide, and they ultimately will and

do respond to truth and quality.

---

Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Ronny](#) on Tue, 08 Mar 2005 04:23:03 GMT

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natpub wrote on Mon, 07 March 2005 22:06bbblackwood wrote on Fri, 04 March 2005 04:25...there's no guarantee of winning this battle, but I will simply not cave in...

bbblackwood wrote on Wed, 02 March 2005 11:02...I cut obscenely loud records from time to time to please artists...

????

This isnt my forum, Im just a musician in a band.

But, from reading the original topic statement, I disagree Brad: You see, I WOULD blame the bands, not the labels, not the consumer, the MP3 downloaders, nor the PEMM's.

I can have producers, managers, investors, and AR guys all giving me all kinds of pressure(and I do), but if I cave-in as the artist and let some piece of garbage be put out with MY NAME on it, then I am the one responsible.

Ya'll's area is one part of things, and you can try to educate your artists, but that's about it--the rest is up to them.

While one can argue that every phase of the industry shares part of the responsibility to make a quality record, the buck has to stop somewhere, and IMO, that is most definately the artist.

The artist doesn't typically get control until they have proven themselves by selling lots of records and either renew the contract or run out of it and sign with another label. Some clients of mine, the band called Savannah to be exact, signed with Mercury Nashville several years ago, they put a full page ad in Billboard and were set up to tour with some of the other label acts like Merle Haggard, which would have given them the exposure that that truly deserved, they got into a debate over the music production and the label dropped their marketing budget like a lead ballon and cancelled the tour. Molly Hatchet not only didn't have any say so in the music, but had to buy their own albums for the family and friends when the first one was released on Epic. It went gold in a short time, so did the second and third, they didn't break even until their third tour and the label never gave them any of their own cd's. They resigned with Capitol after than, but it wasn't a lot better deal. Now none of the original members even own the name and the Molly Hatchet that is recording and touring today have no original members. It's a business and the artist usually has the last say so, until they renogiate. They are the first and last to get screwed in a lot of cases.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [natpub](#) on Tue, 08 Mar 2005 07:32:29 GMT  
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Ronny wrote on Mon, 07 March 2005 22:23  
The artist doesn't typically get control until they have proven themselves by selling lots of records and either renew the contract or run out of it and sign with another label.

I know what you mean by this, I just disagree. It's not that you aren't right, you are. It's just that is but one verison of what happens and what can be done when bands get a deal.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [ammitsboel](#) on Tue, 08 Mar 2005 10:59:34 GMT

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Bob Olhsson wrote on Sat, 05 March 2005 14:36 Sometimes I wish we had no technology other than microphones and recorders. Most music seems to be drowning in technology today!

I guess the difference between you and me is that i wish it all the time and not just sometimes.

I consider the musical, spiritual and technical deduction that have been made over time in the audio business a big joke! And the ones that are being laughed upon is all the people who listen.

Best Regards

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [TurtleTone](#) on Wed, 09 Mar 2005 02:53:56 GMT

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capatilism rules for me in this case. Clients decide what is or isn't what they want. I decide if I can deal with it or not. who is the client? that depends. sometimes it's the label, sometimes it's the engineer, sometimes it's the artist. this isn't in regards to who's paying. I have several engineers that I work with that don't pay the mastering bill, but they are the ones I want to make happy. Sometimes it's the artist that I want to make happy even if I have to battle and loose against the label. I have some engineers that like it loud and they give me all of their work and want it a certain way. I have some engineers that could give a rats ass as to volume as long as it sounds good and I'll battle on their side even if it means me loosing the job. My goal is to realize a vision even if it means to destroy the music if that is what is intended. I am not the authority of what is good or bad. If I wanted to be that, i'd make my own records. The label is usually the last on my list as to who I need to please. I don't care if they are happy or not. If my client, the one who has gone to bat for me to do the mastering, wants it a certain way, then that's the way i'm going to deliver it.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Wed, 09 Mar 2005 03:21:24 GMT

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TurtleTone wrote on Tue, 08 March 2005 20:53 I am not the authority of what is good or bad. If I wanted to be that, i'd make my own records.

Bingo! Very well said!

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Subject: Re: Tha Mastering Engineer's Hippocratic Oath, was Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [dcollins](#) on Wed, 09 Mar 2005 03:59:34 GMT  
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bobkatz wrote on Mon, 07 March 2005 12:48

You sure can be a pain in the ass, DC; you would find shit under a plate on the dinner table because you want to be one.

Well, we're off to a good start. And an apt analogy, to be sure.

Quote:

You ought to take the oath at its face value, which is a basic desire to help impart some ethics, values and collaboration amongst your fellow men.

In other words, mastering technics that YOU DON'T LIKE are a violation of professional ethics?

You should be the "mastering czar," tasked with a Lojack for Limiters, if you will...

Picture something like the wall-sized map of the world in James Bond movies. A red light flashes somewhere on the West Coast and the klaxon sounds. Bob spins in his chair; poised, alert, ready for action.

The map quick-zooms to a studio on Hollywood Blvd, 6033 to be exact. Bob slaps his forehead "Oh, no! That could be Doug. I'd better fax him a another copy of the oath! He promised to call me next time he did more than 4dB."

I do agree that Bob and Bill Roberts should print out a copy, sign it and put it up on the wall of the studio. Better than a Lava Lamp for mellow studio vibes. And a terrific conversation piece.

Quote:

This oath is both EVERYTHING and NOTHING.

Tres Zen. The topic is Art, not Science, so everyone's idea of "damage" is different. You could certainly argue that when the client is happy, nothing was "damaged."

Quote:

Have you ever "damaged" a piece of audio (in your definition of "damage") by the requests of a client? Have you not spoken up about it to the client or did you remain silent?

Of course.

In general, I'm not going to preach. Especially to engineers that have made more records than I've had hot meals.....

Quote:

As for your remarks about the K-System, some people get it, some people understand its variability, and others, like you, get a thing up their ass because they think it's trying to limit you to some arbitrary series of numbers.

Is that either/or? Those are not great choices! I have no problem with an adjustable VU meter reference.

Quote:

Your cynicism should be replaced by a spirit of collaboration. I may like my cars red and you may like them blue, but the common ground is a system of defining what the colors are and how they work.

I admit to being cynical, honest, etc. as well as sharing plenty of knowledge and experience here. You say a lot of stuff that I disagree with, and you've got to admit it's entertaining to hear another viewpoint.

Quote:

Hundreds of engineers around the world seem to be getting it, kid.

If you were to ask the top 5 rooms in the US (I'm not on the list, and neither are you) if they:

- A. Had calibrated their rooms to the "K System"
- B. Relied on meters set to the "K System"
- C. Had heard of the "K System"

I wonder if their response would be: "Que?"

Vlado would drop his levels if only he had the right metering, you know. Gotta be the metering.

DC

---

Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Garrett H](#) on Sun, 13 Mar 2005 16:25:14 GMT

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I've found that you only have a few words or sentences to explain that "audio sausage" is bad when speaking with clients. Most of them don't care to understand the technicalities of mastering - they just want it to sound "good."

So, I just repeat  
over and over that I will make thier CD

"as loud as it needs to be."

Now, you might be thinking, "That sounds stupid! Shut up, Garrett!"

But, I \*swear\* if you say this enough times to clients, they start to get it. You can also have a version that you think is actually "as loud as it needs to be." and then just crush another option to the point that anyone off the street would say it sounds "dehydrated" or "horrible." Ask the client "is this what you want?"

Of course, I don't win this argument all of the time, but for some people the concept sticks. Honestly, those are the ones with real ears. They are the ones who will continue to record. Hopefully they will back off from the level wars.... We shall see.

In short, don't give up on this type of simplistic-bumpersticker-approach to client education.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 10:29:18 GMT

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Garrett H wrote on Sun, 13 March 2005 10:25: But, I \*swear\* if you say this enough times to clients, they start to get it. You can also have a version that you think is actually "as loud as it needs to be." and then just crush another option to the point that anyone off the street would say it sounds "dehydrated" or "horrible." Ask the client "is this what you want?"

Exactly, this works for me as well. In a recent shoot out, I sent two versions, one labeled "good", one labeled "loud". They like "good" even though it was about 6 dB quieter than the version cut by an 'A list' mastering guy...

If we keep chipping away at this, it will get better. We have to have the cojones to keep chipping, though.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [ammitsboel](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 13:07:47 GMT

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bblackwood wrote on Tue, 15 March 2005 10:29

Exactly, this works for me as well. In a recent shoot out, I sent two versions, one labeled "good", one labeled "loud". They like "good" even though it was about 6 dB quieter than the version cut by an 'A list' mastering guy...

Great!!!

It's something like this that keeps me from going insane!...

People are better at using the volume knob now and they are getting better and better :)

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Kendrix](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 14:35:36 GMT

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Im not a pro in the biz so I have no first hand knowledge.

---

However, it seems to me that there has been and always will be a natural balance between fear of failure and the lure of stepping out with something new and having a smashing success.

While one person may see declining sales as a reason to play it safe another will see it as a reason to try something new.

It only takes one successful example of someone trying something new to stimulate many others to try being innovative.

Non-squashed mastering jobs could be one such change.

Sometimes there are dead spots in the cycle and then something completely unexpected takes root and stimulates a new round of change. History suggests its just a matter of time before the cycle flips.

---

Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Crispin HT](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 15:23:18 GMT

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I think sometimes, you ME's are too close to this...

Unlike video, which can be freeze framed and slow moved, audio is transient, and most people cannot hear or any subtle differences. They certainly can't demonstrate them to their friends. The common language doesn't exist. We can, because we're into music, and if you're sitting in front of a set of monitors all day you can become sensitised to very small (sometimes nonexistent) changes.

The purchaser of the music, and often the creators of the music don't hear what you do. They do however hear loudness, and something that shouts at you is considered more exciting and more important. I believe that's why this war exists.

The solution is merely to wait it out, because once everything is loud, silence and dynamics become exciting again. The tide is turning (I've heard over 20 bands in the last 3 months with delicacy in their tunes), just make sure you're there when it happens!

Frighteningly enough, I wonder if iPods will still sound OK, if music starts to have real dynamic...

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [chrisj](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 15:44:45 GMT

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I'm given to understand iPods are a well-designed bit of electronics- didn't Bob Katz say his iPod with Sennheisers is one of his best monitoring systems? I know iTunes (though I had to ditch it because it was buggy for me) sounded better than other mp3 decoding software, possibly because they did something clever like decode to 32 bit and dither. There are always ways to do these things more 'right' and Apple apparently has some good people working on it.

I also remember somebody playing an AIFF test tone over an iPod on the mastering board and commenting that the D/A was particularly low in sidebands. Sure, it'll continue to sound good with good-sounding material.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [Fibes](#) on Tue, 15 Mar 2005 16:58:04 GMT

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Interesting, MEs always make me giggle.

Forgive me, I'm asking us to forget the issues of level, reproduction systems, radio, attention span, genre and all that other stuff y'all ME types have been kicking around, oh, and ethics too.

Kill me for what I'm about to say, it's vaccuous at best, insightful at worst but something everyone has to deal with when putting trends, sicknesses, breast size and ego into context: The environment.

At the shop we have an old book called "The Tuning of the World" and it discusses sound, it's effects on society and some of the history behind how civilization was glued together by sound. How in earlier days the Church bell and Town crier were the loudest things one would hear. Today, given our whirring, buzzing, beeping, humming society we are constantly bombarded by sound, so much so that the town crier wouldn't be heard a half a block away in most instances, hell they've even got cable access for that crap now. So if there is a bake sale, you better hope

aunt Betty tells you about it 'cause the church bell and the crier are now merely part of our environmental noise floor.

Where am i going with this?

Y'all know already, I'm just here to remind you that to ignore the surrounding environment whether societal, droning or pornographic is ignoring the foundation of any sort of rhetoric/polemic.

Now that I've got that off my chest I'll disappear again under my plate.

"I like my shit! I like it loud! I got the box that can rock the crowd!"---Lyrics from a tune Brad will be squashing in less than 2 weeks.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Wed, 16 Mar 2005 01:24:23 GMT  
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Crispin HT wrote on Tue, 15 March 2005 10:23

Frighteningly enough, I wonder if iPods will still sound OK, if music starts to have real dynamic...

I can speak for that. Ipods are pretty darn tolerant of dynamics in most environments, except perhaps roller skating on a busy city street. I have no problems hearing music with "reasonably wide dynamics" in the gym even with a couple of TV's playing the news and just using the little white in ear phones, which do not have that much isolation.

I don't think the Ipod will be the obstacle.

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?  
Posted by [Level](#) on Wed, 16 Mar 2005 01:27:49 GMT

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The I-pod is only true to what is inserted within it.

I have not tried web based purchased tracks as of yet. I do wonder if they are ripping them well, who is doing it, who is getting paid to do it and etc...etccc!!!

What a money train.

10's of Millions of tracks purchased within I-tunes and Napster legal is gaining on that, according to the accounting base.

My G-d...

We missed it friends.

I wonder if Ipod rippers (Within the scope of that) are reciveing album credits??? LOL

What a closed society.

Who is in that???

I was never approached Bob..were you?

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Wed, 16 Mar 2005 13:42:18 GMT

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Fibes wrote on Tue, 15 March 2005 10:58Y'all know already, I'm just here to remind you that to ignore the surrounding environment whether societal, droning or pornographic is ignoring the foundation of any sort of rhetoric/polemic.

Is the world that much louder than it was 10 years ago? I'm listening to Live's 'Secret Samadhi' (mastered by Ted jensen in 1997) and it sounds awesome...

Quote:"I like my shit! I like it loud! I got the box that can rock the crowd!"---Lyrics from a tune Brad will be squashing in less than 2 weeks.

I'm not sure if I'm feeling is giddy or nauseous...

hehe

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucy](#) on Wed, 16 Mar 2005 17:07:34 GMT

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Fibes wrote on Tue, 15 March 2005 11:58 So if there is a bake sale, you better hope aunt Betty tells you about it 'cause the church bell and the crier are now merely part of our environmental noise floor.

Where am i going with this?

Y'all know already, I'm just here to remind you that to ignore the surrounding environment whether societal, droning or pornographic is ignoring the foundation of any sort of rhetoric/polemic.

I agree with you ... but it's is all the MORE reason for some punch in the music. If it's a wall of sound in a world of noise ... the ear tunes it out.

More dynamics plus a little tiny turn of the volume knob = Impact!

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Thu, 17 Mar 2005 23:05:32 GMT

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lucy wrote on Wed, 16 March 2005 12:07

More dynamics plus a little tiny turn of the volume knob = Impact!

Here here! Or should I say, "hear hear".

I mastered a hard rock piece today that I was about to send out to the client when I decided I really needed to pull back on the level almost 2 dB. When listening at an unmatched loudness the hotter mastered version sounded initially impressive to the ear, but not for long. Also, as soon as I turned up the source, the source was clearer and more impacting in certain important respects. And that is the origin of the loudness race, the fact that initially a loud playback sounds "better". After a while of course, the fatigue and the lack of clarity of transients become obvious, but if the master is 6 dB louder than the mix, it can easily impress the uneducated.

The other contributing factor is that there is no standard "level".

I once heard Bob Ludwig once give a demo of a before/after mastering comparison in a lecture and I could hear that the mastered version was more "closed in" and less impacting, but because it was played about 3 dB louder, it impressed virtually the whole audience. We all succumb to this problem, and it is a problem that's hard to explain to our clients. I patiently explained in about 15 minutes time to a client that she had to adjust her volume control in her car when comparing the three reference tracks that I sent that I had called "better" "loud" and "louder". I could have cheated and turned down the "loud" before I laid it down on the CD, but that brings up a different can of worms to explain to A&R.

BK

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bblackwood](#) on Fri, 18 Mar 2005 02:27:18 GMT

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I check the source vs. mastered output in mono to insure the levels are as close as possible. For some reason, checking in mono seems to better help me match the levels...

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [lucy](#) on Fri, 18 Mar 2005 16:04:34 GMT

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bblackwood wrote on Thu, 17 March 2005 21:27:1 check the source vs. mastered output in mono

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to insure the levels are as close as possible. For some reason, checking in mono seems to better help me match the levels...

I did this yesterday for the first time ... comparing 2 mastered versions in mono ... worked well on many levels.

BK, was that Ludwig thing recent? I'd think he'd be more honest than to trick people that way ?

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Subject: Re: Are you scared?

Posted by [bobkatz](#) on Fri, 18 Mar 2005 16:14:01 GMT

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lucey wrote on Fri, 18 March 2005 11:04

BK, was that Ludwig thing recent? I'd think he'd be more honest than to trick people that way ?

No, no. I was not claiming dishonesty in any way. I suspect he was just being incomplete in his explanation to the crowd at the time; it was probably not an intentional trick. And who knows, when the two are level matched, maybe the mastered version would have sounded leisurely better, though I had suspected not in my listening seat. This was a long ago demonstration, maybe 8 years.

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