

My music producing Guide

Production process to memorize

Valuable Tips and Tricks

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Baseline

- Bases can be High, Mid, Low &/or Sub.
- Bases can be gritty, wobbly, round or plucky.
- Pitch bending can put more story to a bass.
- Sub Bases move slower than High bases, keep in mind when composing.
- Chorus and hyper-dimension adds presence and widens.
- Remove bass from sides when large and stereo.
- « Counter beat » Bass hits is a thing, like the Jonas Aden « Punch in the Balls ».
- You can either focus on Rythm (ex: EDM), or on sustain and energy (ex: Pop).
- Use distortion to give bass hearable frequencies, especially subs on small devices.

Drums

Kicks

- Kicks can be Top, Mid and Sub kicks.
- Separate the frequencies with an Eq.
- Top (High) kicks can be on counter-beats to add rythm while the sub or mid kicks can be on beat.
- Keep a sense of rhythm always, kick or not.
- Keep control the energy the kick needs and provides by shaping it's attack and release, envelope plugins can do that. Your song and vibe is the key to deciding how your kick will dynamically sit in your song.
- Acoustic Kicks are amongst the hardest things to mix in my opinion, take your time when compressing and EQ'ing, go back to it a couple times if it feels wrong.
- Big Kicks can sometimes be used as SFX you know! Try reeverbs on them (but cut the lows of the reeverb of course).

Drums

Snares & Claps

- Snares and claps should be their own tracks in my opinion.
- This helps control and create reverses, pre-snares / pre-claps, record and add reversed reeverb tails.
- Speaking of which, add Reeverb Tails, after or reversed as Pre-'x'
- Camel Crusher (distortion) can be a great way to stand out small and short samples!
- Don't forget to space them (room) and pan them accordingly.
- Delays and/or in Reeverb too can be spaced and panned.
- Acoustic snares are also amongst the hardest things to mix in my opinion, take your time when compressing.
- Acoustic snare's room reeverbs completely change their design, try plenty, I like using convolutions as rooms.
- Acoustic snare's room reeverbs are usually gated to the snare if you don't know, meaning the reeverb is only heard when the snare is heard, it can have a small tail too but not too much if it's gated, it's up to you.
- Some pop songs with few elements mix creatively the snares in stereo, maybe it's an idea.

Drums

Extras, snaps, percussions, loops...

- Can use pan to place percussions differently in the mix.
- Orchestrals are usually used and placed in the back of the mix, try proper natural reeverbs (convolutions).
- Stereoize nice samples with a slightly delayed (25-55 ms) and panned copy.
- Organic loops can often surprise, they make for unique ambiance and rhythm. They also give room for imagination with special effects on them.

Melodies

- Calls & responses rule, can be between multiple instruments/synths.
- Use spaces, silences to your advantage.
- Synth and guitar bends can be spice to a melody.
- The best melodies are rarely long sequences, think simple but quality.
- Use layers of melody if need be.
- Don't forget to think of **orchestration**, sometimes a single note by another instrument is stronger than multiple from the main one!

Melodies

Composing for **Soft-Pop / Ballads** music

- Pop ballads and soft pop like Olivia Rodrigo and Lewis Capaldi.
- They tend to often use similar arrangements.
- Guitar LX, Acoustic Guitar, Large Grand Piano, Soft Drums...
- The melodies tend to often have a sustained or repeated note at the top of the chords!
- There isn't a lot of elements so each elements should be mixed and composed in a way they can progress or automate and perhaps take more space as the song progresses.

Melodies

Composing for **Soft-Pop / Ballads** music

- Pianos often have low bassy notes, so the bass plugins should be very sneaky, widened and complementary.
- Keep it simple!!!
- The vocals are like often like a full paragraph, long sentences split with internal rhymes rather than short lines.
- Don't forget to make space for effects and silences in the Vocals but not too much, it's still soft-pop.

Synthesizers

Composing

- The different types of synths to think of:
 - Keyboards (Keys)
 - Organs
 - Analogs (Stranger Things Style)
 - Arpeggios (Arps)
 - Plucks
 - Pads
 - Chords
 - Leads
 - Bass
 - Sequencers
 - Hoovers
 - Choirs
 - Ambient & Textures
 - Drones
 - Whitenoisises
 - Glitches
 - Risers

Synthesizers

Mixing

- Always make sure dry synths sound awesome before Reeverb.
- Duplicate and Delay the copy to widen the sound, giving it mega emphasis and size (dimension).
- Use distortion to add harmonies or grittiness.
- Compressors often end up like effects in this case. (Ex: OTT, camel crush).
- Use layering, layer different synths to make one big one and filter each layers, but make sure they all have their purpose.
- A White noise synth for EDM could actually be necessary in some cases.

Synthesizers

Mixing

- Side-chaining the synths can do cool effects, but sometimes can be required to make space in a crowded instrumental.
- Each synth needs a real role in the song, don't over-stack or over-use.

Vocal Mixing

Lead Vocals

- Main FRONT (center) Vox : Center panned, single recording, cleanest, often intimate.
- Main Left & Right Vox : Catchy parts, emphasis on words, 2 recordings, same phrases.
- You can use Left and Right Vocals as calls and responses, it's there to stand out.

Vocal Mixing

Lead Vocals

- Harmonies:
 - Octave - *Higher and Lower*
 - Third - *Higher and Lower*
 - Fifth which is really interesting! - *Higher and Lower*
 - Seventh for more interesting chord sounding tunes - *Higher and Lower*
 - I saw some people doing « Harmony Stacks », It's basically a print of all the harmonies and it's then mixed and processed super intensively compared to the other vocals.

Vocal Mixing

Back Vocals

- Back Vocals
 - They can also be Harmonies, usually from anyone other than the main singer.
 - Church Vocals, recording plenty of times around the microphone, stacking and drowning in reverb.
- Adlibs
 - Usually there to fill a void or complement the main vocal.
 - They can be placed in the background or at the front by choosing proper reverb.
 - Can also be different vocal and mouthing effects (breathes, screams, singular words, pops, single vowels...).

Vocal Mixing

FX Vocals

- Filters (only highs, only lows, but mostly radio effects)
 - Filter very narrowly! Boost eq gain if needed after filtering.
- Distortions
 - Usually Heavy Crushes, Decapitator or Devil Deluxe on Soundtoys are amazing.
 - Use a filter to cut the lows and highs after processing! Like a radio but less narrow.
- Choruses and Phases
 - Used mainly for bridges and special moments in songs.
 - Widens as well vocals, it could be used on sides for cool stuff!
 - Very subtle chorus could be added to Main leads as well.
- Auto-Tune
 - You can automate the tuning for pitching effects

Vocal Mixing

FX Vocals

- Pitch
 - SoundToys Little Alterboy for Higher and Lower octaves!
 - Push the drive up for distortion effects, then filter!
 - Highs work well in reverb, but can feel cheesy, depends on your vibe.
- Vocoder
 - Can either Use input or Midi Melody
 - Love to hear the chord progressions in Midi mode
 - Vocal Synth from iZotope is the best I've heard out there, but \$\$\$.
- Delays
 - Use Delays for one shots or sentence ends, like call responses, pan left and right or ping pong.
 - With proper theory, you can mess with phasing « issues » with short delays in milliseconds.
 - You can pitch up or down, distortion or/and filter delays!
 - Delays can widen in input or parallel if used say 90 ms panned to right (with original panned left).

Vocal Mixing

Popular FX Vocals

- The Radio FX
 - Done with the filtering, it can be exaggerated.
 - Tape Simulator plugins can be mixed in.
- Travis Scott FX
 - A LOT of stacked autotunes!
 - Super Crushed and distorted vocal
 - Can also add a ton of delay behind, remember to keep control of it.
- Distortion FX
 - Cool for screams or pre-drops, one shots etc.
 - Distortions have a meaning in it's sound design, use it at a proper time and it really boosts it's power and efficiency.

Lyrics Writing

Guidelines to Remember

- Aimed Genre(s)...
- Aimed Subjects or Themes...
- Personal Story linked...
- Words that can describe the piece...
- Aimed felt Emotion...

Lyrics Writing

Tips

- Mix themes and subjects together.
- Metaphores.
- Antitheses/Oximores.
- Onomatopoeia can be written and important.
- Back Vocals Stereo/Surround
- Harmonies Stereo/Surround.
- Call & Response effects.
- Follow an energy progression.
- Rimes = Emphasis on a word. People will remember that word so make it worthwhile!
- Reflect credibility (Connection to a sentiment perhaps defined before writing).
- Syllables « stressed/Unstressed ».
- Count amount of syllables per line.

Mixing

- Always make sure dry sounds sound best before reeverb.
- Place elements horizontally with pan.
- If you feel exotic with pan, you could use binaural or ambisonic mixing plugins on some elements of your song.
- Place element's depth with reeverbs, delays and volume.
- This is where you decide which elements stand out and which don't, some elements are suppose to stand out so make them their place even if it's crowded.
- Mixing can sometimes mean deciding which elements don't have their place, don't hesitate to remove elements if it's for the best.
- Always test the *kick* and *bass* altogether to ensure that it doesn't distort or clash.

Mixing

- If you didn't know, delays can *widen* a sound in multiple ways
 - The original (Mono) on left and a copy on another track with the delay (20-55 ms) panned right.
 - The original (Stereo) sends to a delay track (with 20-55ms) with a stereo widener or something of the sort.
 - These delays don't use the feedback or filter options usually.
 - You got to be careful with off-phase issues of course. Test on studio monitors not headphones.
- I find distortions (CamelCrusher), FX compressors (OTT), SFX plugins (Tape simulators, etc.) and cheap/free plugins underestimated when mixing.
 - They shouldn't be used to make quality moves but they can sometimes achieve a different tuning or design that a perfect high quality plugin can't. Try them like nobody's judging you, because they won't until they know haha.

Mixing

Designing Reeverbs

- Different types of Reeverb chains:
 - Short Reeverbs
 - Are usually used as a widener and ambient feel, you are not suppose to « hear it », you are suppose to « feel it ».
 - Gives life to a sound recorded in dead or isolated rooms, in a controlled manner.
 - Add a stereo widener to the reeverb.
 - Medium and Long reeverbs
 - The usual plate or digital reeverb to use, defines the ambiance, the vibe, the feel of it's input instruments.
 - Mix wisely according to what you aim to do, don't over flood a vocal just because it's a nice tail, think of the mix and purpose.
 - You can also radio filter this reeverb, sometimes even something like 500 to 1,5k Hz can sound better than the entire spectrum.
 - Can be widened and EQ'd too.

Mixing

Designing Reeverbs

- Different types of delays as reeverbs:
 - The Long Echo Tail
 - Usually something like 1/4 beat « analog » delay, feedback up for maybe 2-4 times heard after original sound and set to Ping-Pong mode.
 - Used for very ambient vocals or SFX, but it can crowd the mix very fast so use with intent. It's good for smooth R&B, Tropical, Chill music vibes.
 - The Slap Delay
 - An ambient slap is suppose to sound like a beautiful reeverb with a 1 time feedback, either 1/4 or 1/8 depending on vibe.
 - It feels more like a room than a long reeverb.
 - It's the concept of early reflections, sounds like screaming into a brick wall.
 - Slaps are more common than we think (sometimes more than long reeverb), they can be flexible too.
 - It's used as much in soft pop vocals (ex: Beautiful Scars - Alicia Moffet) as in rock songs. (Ex: Man in the Box - Alice in Chains)
 - Slap Delays are made by combining a delay into a reeverb, but some plugins do both.

Mixing

Designing Reeverbs

- Different types of delays as reeverbs:
 - Mono/Stereo echoes
 - Simple add-ons sometimes on elements to get them to live a little longer in the mix.
 - Leans more towards a delay than a reeverb, RVB mix is pretty low.
 - Sounds great with low and High cuts, especially if it's exponential into the feedback (meaning it has less frequencies the more it feeds, fading out smoothly).
 - Monos are centered of course
 - Stereos are left to right on each feeds, you may use an auto-pan or similar, or even ping-pongs.
 - Stereos can also be even more widened.

Mastering

- Correcting mix in Mid-Side (M-S). You can low cut on the sides.
- ALWAYS use references.
- NEVER master for long periods. Only master with fresh ears and very short periods of time (for me, maximum 30 mins!!!).
- If it sounds good, it's okay not to touch it.
- Do not pull mixing manoeuvres in the mastering, it's not the time anymore.

Tips from Professionals!

- Mahlon Ray Dobbins
 - « Learn to let go. Forcing a track will NEVER make it sound right. Ever.
 - Creativity is like the ocean: it is vast and deep and contains multitudes. It also has a tide that ebbs and flows. You cannot control that flow any more than you can the actual ocean. Stop trying.
 - There are NO RULES. Do whatever you want. Seriously. If you like it, someone else will too. »
- Aaron Spencer
 - « Workflow tip: Make samples out of context of a song, then make a song with the samples. Like the guy said about letting go, this approach allows the arranging process to come quite naturally and is fun. It helps with creativity unlike when you get stuck on messing with a preset in serum instead of arranging. »
- Antonio De Leo
 - « Kick and snare length should be based on bpm and generally speaking all percussive elements when possible. »

My last advice...

« Music is emotions, it's made to share feelings so make people or yourself feel them when listening to your music. »

Hope this guide helps you well! Good luck on your projects.