

MIXING WITH EMOTIONAL IMPACT

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The role of sound engineer is unmistakably technical: taking the acoustic energy from each voice and instrument, transferring it into electrical signal, often transferring it into digital ones and zeroes and amplifying the converted analogue voltage back into the air- making use of an understanding of maths and physics as we do so. Now this is a simplified version of what we do, but at the end of the technical signal flow, where our fingers meet faders and encoders, what we can't forget is that we are amplifying the artistic, emotional and imaginative vision of whoever is on stage.

Emotion



Music is a very human experience and so we can't forget this element when we are mixing. None of the animals make music and express themselves with their voices or instruments like we do- we are unique in that and many other respects! Going to a gig then must be quite a human experience and the artist on the stage is performing a piece of art infused with emotion and expression. Keeping this in mind will help

us to mix in a way that is human, dynamic and exciting. With every bit of processing that we use, we can make sure that we are keeping the emotion that exists on stage intact. We can communicate what the musicians on stage are feeling about what they are performing. We may choose to go easy on the knee and threshold of the compression of the piano. Equally we might compress harder on certain instruments in order to keep them from overpowering but also bring out the nuances of the release of the instrument's envelope which would naturally be heard if we were listening to it on its own in the musician's bedroom.

Impact

As well as expressing emotions and ideas, songs are usually written to impact others without a sound system and a sound engineer. We have to think in broader terms of just making things louder though- we have to think about the impact of the mix on our audience's ears. The crudest way to have more impact is to make something louder- but this isn't always the best way and we also have to be good stewards of how we avoid damaging our audiences ears. There are many ways to create impact that don't involve the rush to join the loudness wars. We might compress the drums in such a way as to make the tail louder, use subtractive mixing or use a condenser mic on the guitar to capture more detail to mix in with the main guitar mic. I generally have a number of techniques that I use to create impact before even turning the faders up louder. I think doing this often helps us to become better at what we do.

A great mix is often hard to measure in decibels, sample rate or channel counts. Although music is somewhat subjective; when we look around the audience and see hands in the air, people dancing or the expressions on faces which are clearly feeling something- then we can see and know that our mix is enabling the art on stage to have an impact.



Aston Fearon is an experienced sound engineer- specialising in mixing Front of House and System Teching - and has worked with a number of venues, PA hire and event production companies in the UK.

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