

Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

Too hard to handle

In my last three columns I discussed dynamics and how we handle them in the mastering process.

But how loud should a track be to compete with the competition? And is there a need to make separate masters for different kinds of media? Think of a master for vinyl, a master for streaming or digital, a master for CD or a master for Compact Cassette.

Well, some serious questions awaiting to be answered!

The first question is not easy to answer. Of course, measuring LUFS will tell us how loud a master actually sounds but it tells us nothing about how the track's volume relates to other tracks from other artists in the same genre.

The "ideal" volume of a song depends on many factors. Is it a ballad or a very energetic or up-tempo song? Which genre are we dealing with? Is there much dynamic movement or is it a dynamically static song? Some serious stuff to take into consideration when determining the perfect volume of a song.

And when it's an album or EP, the flow of the songs is an important factor. Does the volume stay the same throughout the album/EP or is there a *volume wave* to enhance the impact of the album or EP as a whole?

During the mastering session I aim for a global loudness (volume) between -10 and -15 LUFS. Sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less.

The second question about different masters for different types of media is a little easier to answer. Only when we're dealing with a release on vinyl other masters **could** be necessary.

Vinyl doesn't like sibilance (those sharp S- and F-sounds you sometimes hear in -vocal- recordings). Also stereo information in the very low end of the spectrum is difficult for vinyl, as well as high volume (loudness).

The latter is not really a problem nowadays. Since the ending of the *loudness war* volume is not that important anymore.

Some engineers believe that each type of media should have its own corresponding master.

Unless there's a need for an insanely loud (and less dynamic and more weak sounding) master for CD, I don't see the advantages of separate masters for different types of media.

Online music services use loudness normalization and they are using it more and more by default.

The goal is to let different tracks sound equally loud in playlists. In addition every service has its own method of measuring the loudness of a song.

All this makes it irrelevant (for me) to produce separate masters for CD and for online music services (streaming).

Volume: fine by me, as long as it's not too hard to handle!

Renzo

Renzo (Masterenzo) is a Rotterdam based Dutch mastering engineer. He has worked for Gery Mendes (GMB), The Legendary Orchestra Of Love and Phil Bee's Freedom. More info about mastering and about Masterenzo can be found on his [website](#).