

## Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

### Loudness, the myth, the saga, the story. Part 2

Let's begin this second part of loudness in mastering by positioning the loudness war as the most horrendous by-product in this digital age of music.

The loudness war is nothing more and nothing less than the volume war between large major record companies made possible by the ongoing digital evolution in music.

In this war the song of an artist at label A is mastered louder than the song from the artist at label B. The A&R manager (Artist & Repertoire, someone who vastly determines what an artist put out on the market and when he puts his songs out) of label B (the softer one) decides that the song of his artist needs to be mastered at least as loud as the other song from the other label and preferably a little louder!

You could say: why not simply turn the volume knob a little higher? No, way too easy. The song must be louder!

Without going too much into details the cause of the loudness war lies in a combination of factors:

First there's the internet. Because of the fast rise of the internet and accelerating up- and download speeds illegal sites like Napster and The Pirate Bay become popular. CD sales are dropping and the aforementioned A&R managers take musically destructive measures to get most attention and exposure for their label's music artists. Every measure can be accounted for as long as the sales figures are somewhat positive.

The continuously changing music scene causes the lumbering ship of the large major record companies having a hard time staying above the surface. Smaller labels are much more capable of changing course when the market asks for it.

Unfortunately this hasn't stopped the loudness war from evolving into the global volume war as we've gotten to know it.

The loudness war has made quite some victims: innocent recordings have been maliciously tortured during the mastering process causing them to be as loud as your mother-in-law yelling at you because you accidentally forgot to flush the toilet.

This has caused many records during the nineties and zeroes to sound bad, simply because they were mastered too loud using the infamous Waves L2 hardware brickwall limiter. If you take a listen to the low end of for instance 'Sk8er Boi' by Canadian singer Avril Lavigne you can hear the limiter in action with its searing and rattling sound of not only the peaks being limited but the whole signal undergoing the destructive limiting processing of the L2.

The *Brickwall* terminology implies that we're dealing with a machine capable of doing some serious harm to innocent recordings.

Well, if we stick to this plan the music industry would not have a glorious future ahead but: Thou shall have no fear. Next month I will publish the closing of the loudness triptych resulting in stereophonic salvation for us earthlings.

Salvation in order to correct this human made error in audio history.

On to the next war up ahead: dynamics!

Renzo

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