

Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

The mental coach

You wouldn't expect a title like this when it comes to columns about mastering. Actually, coaching is an important aspect of mastering. For instance a phone call after having done mix checks or after receiving your masters. It happens more often than you'd think.

Often a call like that is related to expectation management. Mastering is the final step in the production process and the expectations about the end product are pretty high. It's also the final step where you have some influence on the sound of music.

Realistic expectations are the most difficult ones. Of course you'd like to directly compete soundwise with that last album of Adele. But how realistic is that? Albums by Adele are made in fancy studios with even more fancy equipment operated by some very fine craftsmen.

We can expect that mastering elevates your mixes to a higher level. Actually, that is exactly what mastering does or should do in my opinion. Your mixes should translate perfectly into our streaming world as well as on vinyl or CD or music cassette.

What's not fair to expect is that mastering elevates your mix that has some minor flaws straight to the sonic level of the last album by that famous British singer.

Like I said in earlier columns: the better the mix, the better the end result! Or to put it another way: the less I have to twist my knobs, the better it will sound (this only works on extremely good mixes). Exactly this forms the basis of many of the coaching sessions I have done so far.

Perspective is one of the main objectives during coaching, I bet any professional coach will agree with me. In this case the perspective of the listener is the most important one. As an artist you're making music for the listeners. Hearing music like your audience does is very difficult but it certainly helps to put many things (including mastering) in perspective.

Another subject are the technical challenges we engineers are bound to solve. During mastering we're expected to perform some kind of voodoo magic to the song. Even though we can do a lot of tricks nowadays, our magical toolkit has its limitations.

And ever so many times it's just a small conversation about a client wanting their songs to have a tad more air or low end. Clients are your dearest friends and having good contact with them is pretty essential. As mastering is the final step before releasing your songs to the outside world, it's better that I squeeze every bit of sound out of your mixes, resulting in that big smile on your face as you take your freshly made masters home with you.

I really enjoy those talks on the phone. Sometimes a conversation is not an easy one but with each conversation I learn something. I see it as a part of my job. People ask me all kinds of stuff about mastering and I'm more than willing to provide them with answers. The mastering coach!

Renzo

Renzo (Masterenzo) is a Rotterdam based Dutch mastering engineer. As the owner of premium mastering studio Masterenzo Mastering he has worked for many independent artists like Ocober, Black Nazareth and Hédi Carlee (Charlie Dée).

More info about Masterenzo Mastering can be found on masterenzo.nl.