

Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

We'll fix it in the mastering

"We'll fix it in the mastering" is not the best English, stating a problem that really shouldn't be a problem.

The mix is the place where most crucial decisions are made after a recording is done. Decisions about the balance and atmosphere of a song are greatly determined in the recording or mixing stage.

Mastering is just the magnifying glass on the mix. All decisions made in the mix are being evaluated and brought up, amplified or attenuated when necessary. It's that ear for detail what makes mastering such a great job.

A good mix needs little correction or tweaks. If a mix kicks ass, the last thing you want is to extract precious energy from it. Just a bit more volume or the earlier mentioned magnifying glass is probably all it needs to establish connection to the outside world.

The so called "problem" occurs when certain choices are being postponed in the mixing stage. It is this postponement that could lead to a situation where choices end up at the place where they don't belong: the mastering session.

When for instance a mix lacks good vocal balance, it's very well possible that this is caused by not choosing the right vocal balance in the mixing process. Should the vocals be on top of the mix or more in the mix? Serious questions that deserve serious answers!

If these questions are not answered in time, they might end up being postponed right into the mastering session. Exactly what we don't want.

When this decision or choice of vocal balance ends up in the mastering session, it's very hard to do something about it. Changing the vocal balance in a mix is easy: turning the vocal fader up or down usually does the job perfectly.

Adjusting the vocal balance in a mastering context is a little more tricky. Tools like (dynamic) EQ, compression and other trickery have to be used to make corrections on a full mix, without sacrificing the energy present and without changing other elements in the mix too much.

Choices! Preferably choices made *before* the mastering session. It would make mixes so much better. A good answer to a mix question needs to be answered in the mixing stage, right before bouncing the mix to a stereo file to be sent to the mastering studio.

Of course we could revert back to the mix when a vocal balance needs correction. That certainly is a lot easier and better sounding than corrections made in the mastering stage.

Unfortunately this is often not possible due to deadlines and busy times for mixing engineers, forcing us to work with the given mixdown.

So again: make choices where they belong, be it a recording or a mixing session. The end result will get better. More power, more connection and probably even more necessity or urge to get your record out there! There we go, yet another topic for a column about mastering: "The necessity of a record".

So choose people, CHOOSE! It would make records so much better or even close to perfection!

Renzo

Renzo (Masterenzo) is a Rotterdam based Dutch mastering engineer. He has worked for Gery Mendes (GMB), The Legendary Orchestra Of Love and the John F Klaver Band.

More info about mastering and about Masterenzo can be found on his [website](#).