

100 Producers with 100 Opinions

By Klisk

Foreword: Producers were in hot debate over why Rainbow & Rooted allowed flawed and imperfect mixdowns into the album, and then questioned further why “One Last Shot!” was taking such a stand. Klisk responded with a critical observation of music producers today. Dear listeners, if you don't understand it all, don't worry, this message is mostly for the new-generation music producers who download the album, and even they might be unfamiliar with terms involving analogue tracking and mixing. Prepare for a trip to the past.

Get 100 producers in the same room with the same track and you'll get 100 different mixes with 100 different opinions on why their mix is the correct one. It all depends on their background in music, their methodology, and at the end of the day it really just boils down to GiGo. If you're spending more time applying VST effects and EQ curves to your track rather than actually *mixing* it then you should probably throw the track out and record it the right way from scratch. You know you have a good mix when all you have to literally do **is** mix, not sit around patching up recording imperfections, adding post effects, polishing the high end until it's white noise, quantizing the drums so the kick hits perfectly on every beat at 160bpm.

I feel bad that the current generation of bedroom producers will never truly understand the concept of ear fatigue. After all, they've had harsh mixes shoved down their earholes since they first discovered music. They've grown accustomed to vocals being on top of the track instead of blended in. They'll never spend hours re-amping a synth or bass to get a better sound, predominately because they think a VST can replace an analog fuzz pedal through a decent cab. They solely mix their tracks [on fucking headphones](#) instead of studio monitors.

There's definitely a charm to recording on an 8-track reel, and the results are rewarding. Hipsters aside, people listen to vinyl because it sounds less harsh - It cuts off the high end frequencies that are generally uncomfortable to the human ear. Now, when you hear a 'modern' album, there is nearly no cut-off. You can call it hi-fidelity, but it's still unpleasant. Everyone seems to mix too hot.

Producing on a computer is convenient, but it's hard to say it's better. Different genres of music do cater to different mixing ideologies. I do work in software based DAW's nowadays, it's been a good 10 years since I worked on tape, but I treat the software DAW as if it were analog as a compromise. Still, you're sacrificing a lot. You'll constantly hear “Why can't I sound like (that) EDM artist from the 90's?” or “Why can't I get the ‘magic’ that was on those old early 90's rock/metal albums?” It's the production. Or rather, your **over** production. Instead of letting the song's BPM bounce around like it would with a real drummer, or letting some mic bleed occur, or hearing someone slam a door in the background, or playing a synth live and *not* quantizing it, you're essentially creating a pasteurized track. That doesn't mean the song isn't well composed, it may be a masterpiece composition-wise, but it sounds too perfect; There's no energy like there would be in a live performance. Your album *should* sound like a live performance! You should imagine the artist playing live in the studio, not sitting behind a laptop with a bag of popchips and a red bull. (Not that I don't like red bull, but you get my point.)

Go back to ten years ago and pull out an album that used to get you genuinely excited, pumped, or even wonderstruck. Listen to it now. Chances are you'll think the mix sounds like shit and you'll suddenly notice every imperfection in the performance. You may even wonder, *how could I have liked this?* Congratulations, you're finally a producer! Set that aside, though. Keep listening to the album. If you're not singing/humming along by the last song then you're probably lying. Now go imagine how that album would sound if it was recorded to the standards that folks expect today. Chances are it would make for a pretty damn boring album.

Another exercise: Go back in time and listen to a track like *Window Licker*. Now, make believe you never heard the song before, and that you have absolutely no idea who the artist is - It's just some nobody that released a track on the internet. What would your impressions of the song be? You may praise the creativity, however, the first thing most bedroom producers would do in this situation is slam the song's production. The drums are weak. The mix is imbalanced. There's a lot you could say is wrong with the track from this perspective. So, drop back in the fact that it's an Aphex Twin song and all of a sudden the production is a masterpiece. This is the psychology of persuasion. It is commonly believed, subconsciously I must stress, that if something isn't professional (or more accurately, a hit on itunes/youtube) that it must be inherently flawed. This creates a conundrum in where one is able to nitpick at every opinionist flaw, taking solace in the perceived notion that it must be bad since it isn't popular. However, should that track ever become successful, the original perception changes and it's assumed that the song was simply misunderstood upon first listening.

There's a window for good production, and once you reach that window everything after it is simply icing on the cake. Many people seem to forget this, however, and only care to consume the icing. This is why it's important to ask yourself "Does this track sound good, or are there real problems here?" before running around like a child and sticking your fingers in the icing. Once you hit that quality window everything after it is up for artistic interpretation, which as I mentioned at the beginning of this, leads back to my "100 producers, 100 mixes" theory.

It makes sense to me now why live music is dying - The imperfections on the albums of old *were* the magic. It was human. Nowadays you get an album that is so polished that the live performance could never compare - The recording isn't *really* what the musician performed. Why spend good money to hear an inferior version of the album you downloaded for free? Seeing live music now is like hearing a demo rather than a performance of the album. What people forget, however, is that the demo is *probably better*.

I'll leave all you wonderful people out there with a few recommendations:

Butch Vig on production: <http://www.gearslutz.com/board/q-butch-vig/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awg9n9mLi0w>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkLYrVsFwqw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOYvTXUqlrI>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP_N6qHuZ5E

Not very informative, but awesome: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1dYe1CbENA>

Steve Albini: <http://www.avclub.com/articles/steve-albini-hates-music-fads-cher.88812/>

<http://www.themagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2012/05/10/steve-albinis-reddit-ama-is-super-reasonable-funny-informative>

http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/td90c/i_am_steve_albini_ask_me_anything/

Bonus Round: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XraAOJdyrNA>