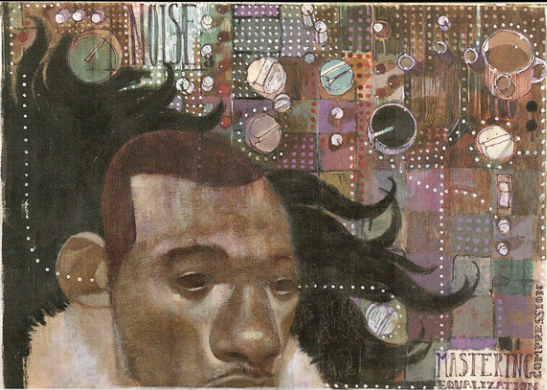


iN

MY STUDIO

AS TOLD TO
SA'IDILLUSTRATION
EDWARD KINSELLA III

Mastering your album? Sonic guru Chris Athens knows how to make it pop.

Today's technology makes it easier than ever for producers to perform every step of the recording process themselves. But when it comes to mastering—the last creative step before a song or album is sent to a pressing plant for duplication—skip the D.I.Y. approach and hire a pro like Chris Athens. The Senior Mastering Engineer at New York's Sterling Sound recently put the final touches on albums by Fabolous, USDA and Redman, among others. Peep the science.

WHAT IT IS

"The process of mastering usually includes the sequencing of songs, the spaces between the songs, fades [and] any [final] editing that has to be done. [Also] the last minute flavor, which usually has to do with EQ, compression [and] leveling. What you're looking for in mastering is to maximize the things that are best about the mixes."

MIXING VS. MASTERING ROOMS

"In a mix room, there are certain anomalies, acoustically, that usually happen that aren't normally present in a well-designed mastering room. Mix rooms focus on functionality, how to blend many tracks into [one]. Mastering rooms tend to focus on the quality of playback sound. It can be really difficult to be objective when you're mastering a record on the same speakers you mixed it on."

MONITORS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

"Interplay between the speakers and the room is the most crucial element of mastering. You want the finest playback environment you can [afford]. My monitors are very high-resolution three-ways with a really good sub system—I use Dynaudio C4s."

HOW IT'S DONE

"I like to load up the whole record, listen to it, see where it's at as a whole, kind of organically. Then you make slight adjustments; some songs may need more bottom end, some may need more top end."

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

"Once you've hammered the [entire] record into place so it sounds like a cohesive whole, then the process of actually putting the songs in order begins. Actually spacing them out, fading them properly and getting them to come in so they feel right." ●

Work the Angles

Use these low-cost options to get your project polished.

STERLING SOUND'S "AFTER HOURS" PROGRAM

sterlingsound

For a little over \$1,000 you can get a full project

mastered in Sterling's state-of-the-art mastering house by one of their Senior Engineer's protégés. (sterling-sound.com)

IZOTOPE OZONE 3

Ozone 3

Use this mastering plug-in to beef up your tracks. The

dynamics compressor, paragraphic EQ, harmonic exciter and loudness maximizer give you all the components needed for accentuating a track's unique sonic qualities. (izotope.com)

REDSECTA MASTERING

redsecta

If cash is really tight, \$25 a song can get your whole album

sequenced and mastered, ready to be sent off for mass duplication. Deliver your tracks via CD or digital transfer then sit back and wait to hear the finished product. (redsecta.com) PAUL CANTOR