

11th Annual Directory of Mastering Studios

Over 350 Contacts!



MUSIC CONNECTION

Informing Music People

Andrew Stockdale of **WOLFMOTHER** Follows Up **Monster** Debut with **All New Band**

GREEN DAY
Guest Shredder **ROCKS**
Madison-Square Garden

4 MASTERS of Mastering

Sound Advice From The Experts:



Eric Conn
Cage the Elephant
Kenny Chesney

Gavin Lurssen
Robert Plant
Matchbox Twenty



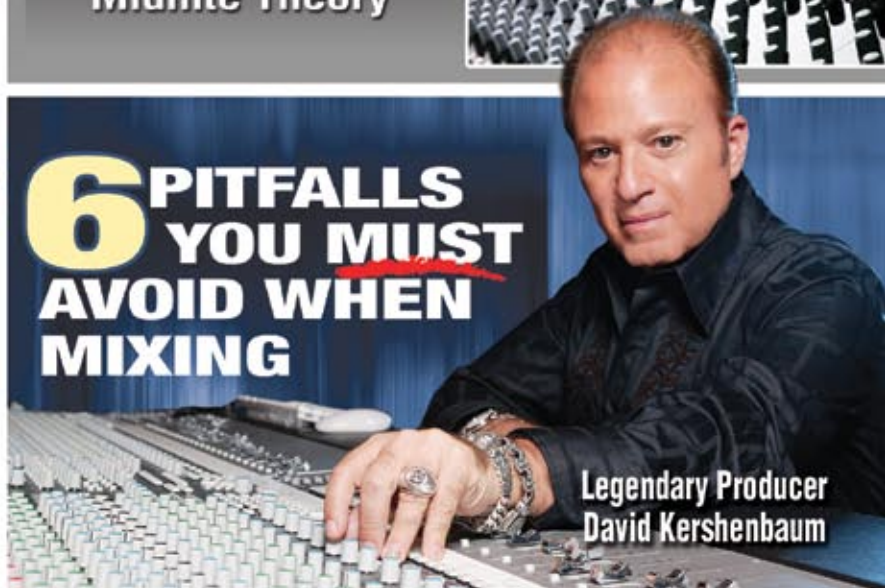
Ron Boustead
Rolling Stones
Tom Petty



Bruce Maddocks
Disney Records
Midnite Theory



6 PITFALLS YOU MUST AVOID WHEN MIXING



Legendary Producer
David Kershenbaum

Vol. 33, OCTOBER 2009 • U.S. \$3.95/\$4.95 Canada



2009

4 Masters of Mastering

by Rob Putnam

Music Connection is proud of its reputation for helping artists and musicians gain a greater understanding of the more intimidating areas of the music business and music-making process. Mastering is a perfect example — it's as essential as it is mystifying. As we do each year, **MC** again presents a series of revealing, down-to-earth conversations with acclaimed mastering engineers. While each has his own approach, all share a common interest in educating musicians to be more informed and successful clients.



ERIC CONN

Company: Independent Mastering
Clientele: Cage the Elephant, Flying Machines, Garth Brooks, Kenny Chesney
Contact: 615-425-0739,
www.independentmastering.com

Eric Conn earned his undergraduate degree in music from the University of Massachusetts, Boston; he then started down the mastering path in 1994 with Sheffield Lab Recording, sister company to The Mastering Lab, both in Ojai, CA. He later found himself working with Denny Purcell in 1998. In 2001 Conn launched Nashville's Independent Mastering, where he works in a cross-section of music genres.

What distinguishes one mastering engineer from another?

Experience. But mostly everyone has a different background and training. Some of us have music degrees, others have a technical background. Personally, I have both. I have a passion for music and electronics.

What's your proudest achievement as an engineer?

The fact that we get to do such a variety of music: from rock & roll to bluegrass. We're able to encompass many genres of music and we have a terrific track record of repeat clientele. I'm proud of the relationships I've built and the quality of music we get to work on.

How can artists best choose a mastering engineer?

Today's musician is usually self-propelled and they don't often have large funding behind them, so they need to consider their budget. Of course the engineer's experience is also important.

What are some of the most important things you know now that you wish you knew when you started?

I should have taken more psychology and communication classes. The better the communicator you are, the more success you'll have. It's important to understand where an artist is coming from. There are so many ways to describe music and tone.

What are some of the biggest problems/mistakes you hear in mastered recordings today?

Loud records continue to be made because many people aren't educated. It comes down to an understanding of sound and quality. People are becoming blasé about their listening experience. Low quality is "good enough." I find this reflected in the acceptable video quality of YouTube and even on news channels. The more you accept fuzzy and distorted audio or picture, the more the art form suffers.

We've spent so much energy trying to get the clearest picture or sound and it's all being forgotten because the technology allows it to be "good enough."

“PEOPLE ARE BECOMING BLASÉ ABOUT THEIR LISTENING EXPERIENCE. LOW QUALITY IS ‘GOOD ENOUGH.’”

—ERIC CONN

What should artists do to prepare for the mastering session?

Label everything. They should have a sequence set in stone and they should be happy with their mixes. Many of the artists that we work with are already out on the road by the time it comes to the mastering phase. In those cases we have the producer and/or the mix engineer attend the session.

What do you say to people who try to master for themselves?

Call if you want us to fix it. Again, it comes down to “Is it good enough?” If it’s acceptable to you, then I guess it’s okay. If somebody can’t afford mastering, then they can’t afford it. That has to be okay. Ultimately it’s the artist’s album and they have to be happy with what they’re releasing. Using a mastering engineer should help foster that.

What’s the most effective way to keep business coming in the door?

Word of mouth. That’s always worked for us.

What big changes in mastering do you think we’ll see in the next five years?

Physical media is beginning to disappear. We’re getting more and more mixes delivered via FTP. In the next five years we’ll be doing a lot more digital delivery versus physical. I don’t think physical media is going away but it will change. People bring projects in on a thumb drive now instead of a data disk.

Any final advice?

The most important thing in the creation of a piece of art is to be able to let it go. That can be one of the hardest things for an artist to do and accept it as it is. That’s a problem for a lot of people.



GAVIN LURSSSEN

Company: Lurssen Mastering

Clientele: Robert Plant, Matchbox Twenty, Johnny Cash

Contact: Gavin Lurssen, 323-924-7193, www.lurssenmastering.com

Gavin Lurssen launched his career in 1991 when he started as an errand boy at Hollywood’s The Mastering Lab following his graduation from Berklee College of Music. After a few short years he began to master for well-known artists and his reputation took root. He’s worked his way up to owning his own facility in Hollywood and has won three Grammys, notably for the O Brother, Where Art Thou? soundtrack. He sits on the NARAS board of governors.

What distinguishes one mastering engineer from another?

Every person contributes to society by what they bring to the table, in terms of their sensibilities, sensitivities and creative input. Everyone is different and it creates a community. Why are some people busier than others? They’ve figured out how to play the game. A lot of creative people tend to get competitive. I try to look at it the opposite way: if the community survives, then we all survive.

What’s your proudest achievement as an engineer?

It’s the scope of the work that makes me proud. A seasoned engineer said to me once in the early days, “The key to your success is to work on a lot of records over a long period of time.” It’s best to get your rhythm going and get your chops so that the service you provide becomes the thing you’re proud of. But my proudest achievements are when people come in and somehow or another I’ve contributed to their educational growth.

What are some of the biggest problems or mistakes you hear in mastered recordings today?

My greatest accomplishment in the studio is to make it sound like I was never there. When I listen to music at home, I don’t get into who did what to it, because people have different sensibilities and sensitivities. If I hear something that’s veiled and it interferes with my connection to the recording, that bothers me, especially when it sounds like something’s gone through a lot of digital processing and it sounds two dimensional. I hear poor mastering about 25 percent of the time.

What should artists do to prepare for the mastering session?

If you come in and try to micromanage somebody, it’ll end up taking twice as long. But a common problem is a mixing engineer will give a compressed version of a mix to their artist because they want it to sound as loud as a Green Day record. I listen to the mix before it has gone through that process. So I’m getting it at least one step back. If an artist feels the need to have this, they should come with the hyped-up mix and a regular, moderate level one which they can use to judge the balances.

What do you say to people that try to master for themselves?

I don’t advise it for a million reasons. The tools that I have — tools that I’ve spent 20 years developing — are not only customized pieces of gear but the way that they interact takes years to develop. It takes a very long time to get a chain of events that proves itself. I’m a specialist. Mastering is what I do every day and most nights. There’s no way that you could compete with someone that specializes in a field.

“I HEAR POOR MASTERING ABOUT 25 PERCENT OF THE TIME.”

—GAVIN LURSSSEN



What's the most effective way to keep business coming in the door?

I'm a big proponent of making sure that the community survives. We all work off of each other. I see a lot of people run studios and businesses very competitively and acting like they're the only ones on the block. Nobody survives like that. Embracing the communal aspect and supporting artists is what works for me.

What big changes in mastering do you think we'll see in the next five years?

Mastering is going to become more important. There's been an exponential expansion in the number of records on the market. The trusted veterans are few and far between to service that market of tens of thousands of records that have applied for ISRC codes. That doesn't even count the garage band kids. Both seasoned and unseasoned engineers are going to be quite busy.

Any final advice?

I encourage young people to think carefully about how they can contribute to the infrastructure that we live in. Be encouraged about the future of mixing creativity and integrating it into this economic and technical infrastructure. Think about how you can make it better. I look to the young people to bring new energy.



"Firehouse Studios blends the most contemporary digital technology with the best of the vintage analog gear. Firehouse is truly my home away from home."
- Don Murray

"I liked it so much I wrote a song called the 'Firehouse Chill' for the Fourplay CD Journey that we recorded there. They really did it right at The Firehouse!"
- Nathan East

RON BOUSTEAD

Company: Precision Mastering
Clientele: Rolling Stones, KISS, Tom Petty
Contact: Claudia Lagan, 323-464-1008

Ron Boustead started in the business more than 20 years ago when he ran the mastering department for a cassette duplication company in Pasadena, CA. He's spent the past 15 years at Precision Mastering. Interestingly, he still cuts vinyl (about 20 percent of his business), primarily for singer/songwriters and jazz artists, such as Howard Hewitt and Kirk Whalum.

What distinguishes one mastering engineer from another?
 The top-tier engineers are created equal. We all do this on a very high level under a lot of pressure and we all have the same gear, give or take. There's a whole other range of people who may refer to themselves as mastering engineers but really they're a project studio that also does mastering. It's tough to do a good job at mastering if it's not what you focus on uniquely.

How do artists best choose a mastering engineer?
 Through recommendations, through an engineer's body of work and by reading the credits on their favorite CDs. They can also talk to two or three engineers to see if there's a vibe, to make sure what they want to accomplish is understood. They can always ask an engineer to master one of their mixes as a sample. The way *not* to choose is price. If you're going to shop around for the lowest price, you're asking for trouble.

THE FIVE-STAR RECORDING EXPERIENCE

firehouse
RECORDING
STUDIOS

firehouserecordingstudios.com

5.1 SURROUND - AUDIO/FILM/TV
MASTERING BY BERNIE BECKER

For bookings, please contact Candace Stewart, Studio Manager
 candace@firehouserecordingstudios.com | 626.405.0411 | 35 West Dayton Street Pasadena, CA 91105



“IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT WHERE THE VOCAL SITS IN THE MIX, GIVE ME A VOCAL UP-MIX AND A DOWN-MIX SO THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES.”
—RON BOUSTEAD

What are some of the most important things that you know now that you wish you knew when you started?

When I look around my room there are a few familiar pieces of gear but there's a lot of stuff that wasn't invented when I first started. And sessions have changed. Seventy five percent of the time I'm downloading files because people don't attend sessions. That's why I'm starting a new business, a new mastering paradigm. I've built my own studio and I'll offer internet-based mastering at resolutionmastering.com.

What are some of the biggest problems/mistakes you hear in mastered recordings today?

Over-compression. And people's mixes are really dense. There's a lot going on, so it's hard to find a sweet spot for every voice and instrument. When the stuff comes in like that, almost any processing can make it worse. Guys working in small studios with nearfield monitors — a bookshelf speaker, something like a Yamaha NS10 — also have trouble finding the right spot for the kick and the bass because they're not hearing that lower octave.

What should artists do to prepare for the mastering session?

Never compromise the mix and expect that the mastering engineer will be able to save it. I start a client dialog early and invite them to send me mixes, even if it's an MP3. I put it up in the mastering room and give them early feedback.

If you have a question about where the vocal sits in the mix, give me a vocal up-mix and a down-mix so there are alternatives. Same for the kick.

Make sure you know what the sequence of your project will be and print song titles so it's all very clear. List any problems or concerns with a song. Get ISRC codes in advance. Otherwise it can delay a project by days.

What do you say to people that try to master for themselves?

The mastering engineer is like the last gas station before you cross the desert. You have a chance to have a seasoned professional make your project everything it can be. If five years from now you're listening to your record, you still want to love and be proud of it. Mastering is a really bad place to cut corners.

What's the most effective way to keep business coming in the door?

Make sure all clients leave happy with their project; otherwise they'll tell people about it. I still go to live shows and pass out business cards.

What big changes in mastering do you think we'll see in the next five years?

Doing it all online. That's a very appealing alternative for people who are busy or who aren't in a major metropolitan hub. I think we'll see the demise of the CD as a media choice, but that doesn't mean that artists won't need mastering.

Any final advice?

Be on time for sessions. Time is money. Don't bring your posse; anything that distracts the engineer will detract from your project. Some clients stay up all night finishing their mixes before a session. If that's the case, you might as well drop your project off and go home because you won't be any help. Lastly, come in with your mix choices made.



To the Moon...and Back

Whether he's performing on stage or creating in his studio, sound alchemist and Rabbit in the Moon frontman Bunny knows his Euphonix Artist Series controllers are indispensable to his craft.

“The MC Mix and MC Control are at the heart of my studio and have totally changed the way I work. The touch and feel are so conducive to creativity - they've freed me up completely. I get the feeling that I am mixing on a huge \$200,000 mixing console, but in a compact little module that fits in my backpack.”

Projects:

Remix work for: Tori Amos, Sarah McLachlan, Goldie, White Zombie, Garbage, Smashing Pumpkins and Eric Clapton.

Most recently intro/outro show videos for Paul Oakenfold's Planet Perfecto Vegas show and 50 Cent's international tour.

Bunny uses MC Control and (2) MC Mixes to control his:

- Logic Pro • Final Cut Pro
- Nuendo



©2009 Euphonix Inc. All Rights Reserved. MC Control and MC Mix are trademarks of Euphonix Inc. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners.

BRUCE MADDOCKS

Company: The Orbit Room Mastering
Clientele: Disney Records, David Wilson,
Midnite Theory
Contact: Bruce Maddocks, 818-222-4600

Maddocks has worked in recording for a staggering 37 years. He started at A&R Recording in New York City, moved on to The Hit Factory and then to Capitol Studios in L.A. He ultimately launched The Orbit Room Mastering in 2001 and has remastered a good number of older recordings while also working on tape transfers and other such preparations. He often likes to work with analog gear that he's modified himself.

What distinguishes one mastering engineer from another?

The amount of experience an engineer has. It comes in many ways: an apprenticeship, excellent hearing and being fairly musical. It's also based on the type of gear that the engineer has. They can have a minimal setup and produce great product but the reverse is also true: they can have a great setup and produce substandard product.

What's your proudest achievement as an engineer?

The first *Pirates of the Caribbean* soundtrack. It was an epic project and we did a very fast turnaround on that. It was challenging both time wise and dynamically.

How can artists best choose a mastering engineer?

They should listen to a good cross-section of music that's both in-genre and out-of-genre for them and then pick an engineer based on what they like hearing on those CDs. It's a fairly safe bet that if they like what an engineer did on one record, he'll be able to do a fine job for whatever the artist is working on.

What are some of the most important things that you know now that you wish you knew when you started?

I used to ask clients to give me mixes with two or three db of headroom from digital zero. I now ask from three to six, just so I can get more overall dynamics. Also, I try to get as much information to clients before they bring in their projects. In the past, something would come in the door with problems and I'd have to deal with it.

I've moved away from client-attended sessions. I can work much more efficiently by concentrating exclusively on the music and not wondering if the client wants more water.

I used to concentrate heavily on the plug-in aspect. I've since realized that I get better results by minimizing plug-ins and running 95 percent of the signal through a selectable analog path.

What are some of the biggest problems/mistakes you hear in mastered recordings today?

Over-compression and the lack of dynamics. It's come to the point of loudness for loudness' sake. And it's not the fault of the mastering engineer. Often it's what the artist or the label wants. But there's been an education among artists, and hopefully labels, that CDs are now almost as unlistenable as MP3s. Hopefully we can get back to nice, quieter dynamic records.

What should artists do to prepare for the mastering session?

They shouldn't put anything but a very light buss compression across the stereo buss. Don't maximize or brick wall anything. If I can show a client the difference between a mix or



“I USED TO ASK CLIENTS TO GIVE ME MIXES WITH TWO OR THREE DB OF HEADROOM FROM DIGITAL ZERO. I NOW ASK FROM THREE TO SIX, JUST SO I CAN GET MORE OVERALL DYNAMICS.”

—BRUCE MADDOCKS

a master that has reasonable dynamic range and something that's loud just for the sake of being loud, I can usually win them over.

What do you say to people who try to master for themselves?

They should educate themselves on the process and what to expect. Bob Katz's book on mastering (*Mastering Audio Art and Science*) is a fairly straightforward read. It's not just for experienced mastering engineers. Artists should also be selective about what they see on the internet because there's a lot of bad information out there.

What's the most effective way to keep business coming in the door?

Keep your client base happy, because there's ample word of mouth. We do a lot of work with Kitchen Works, a production company in Ventura County. They continually cycle their artists through our facility.

Also, I always offer to do a sample mastering for clients. I suggest that they give me a clip that contains the meat of a song and then send it to two other engineers. They should compare the three results and make a decision based on what they hear.

Any final advice?

Artists need to educate themselves as much as possible during the mixing stage. They should then come to the mastering session fully prepared. Have the material as close to the finished goods as they can. Give an engineer the headroom he needs and don't make him take out clicks and pops. It's all about preparation.