

The Mother of Invention: Creative Commitment as a Reaction to Financial and Technological Uncertainty

DSP power has increased at a staggering rate over the last twenty years, with many mixers now publically stating that all but the most colourful forms of audio signal processing can be convincingly imitated in the digital domain. In conjunction with this technological advance, the financial squeeze within the recording industry has resulted in many engineer/producers preferring to mix solely 'in the box'. As a surface understanding of the power of the modern DAW permeated non-technical communities, requests for multiple mix recalls, remix stems and arrangement changes have become commonplace at the behest of artists, management and labels alike. Hardware based 'real time' mixing processes have become prohibitively expensive and suspicion around audio degradation following multiple stages of 'hardware insert' AD/DA conversion has muddied the waters on a technical level.

My own practice is aesthetically very broad, but whether working with art pop (Dutch Uncles) contemporary jazz (GoGo Penguin / Gaz Hughes) or millennial retro pop (Francis Lung) an unexpected by-product of this situation has seen me increasing the amount of parallel hardware processing which I print whilst in the initial tracking stages of a project. In pre-emption of the mixing process (and as a direct reaction to limited time or funds) many of my most recent sessions have employed increased channels of parallel compression, distortion and saturation along with multiple layers of simulated and natural reverberation which I might previously have only – slowly and expensively - added in a hardware mix environment. Although initially born of adversity, this commitment has had a positive effect on many artist's performances; we have collaboratively established a production aesthetic early in the record making process, allowing musicians to perform confidently within a sonic environment close to that of the final mix.