

Assessment 2 - Echoes by FIN

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Module CRMT160

Aim

After listening carefully to the tracks, which according to Braddock is the most important skill (Hepworth-sawyer 2019: 217), I aimed for a more rhythm focused “funk” type approach to the mix.

Discussion

To begin with I stripped off the number prefixes on the stem file names to make the names easier to see in Logic. As can be seen in Figure 1, Smart Tempo (Apple 2023) was used for the audio files import as the separate files all have the same tempo of 109 as specified in the studio project “readme”.

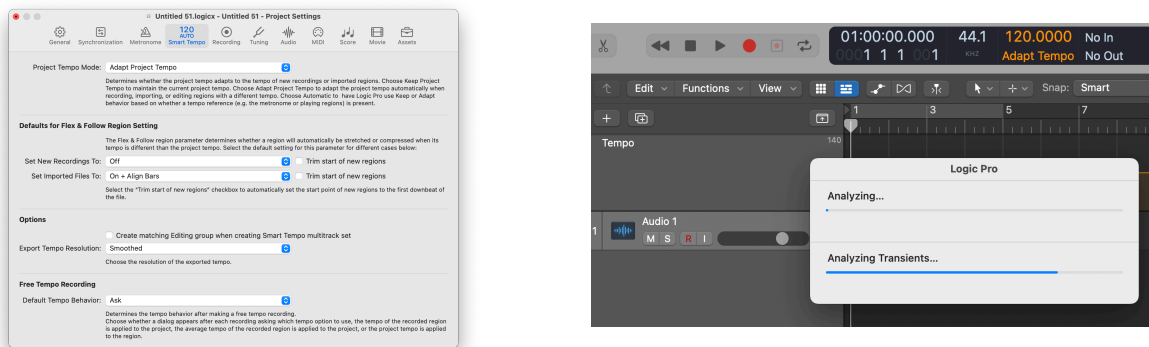


Figure 1 - Smart Tempo

I also used “rainbow colours” for the tracks and set track icons where they had not already been set by Logic on import in order to organise and layout the project before starting mixing.

“Before beginning the mix proper there are a few routine housekeeping tasks [...] Rearranging and colouring tracks in the DAW ...” (White 2011: 255)

Be Thankful for What You’ve Got by Massive Attack was used as a reference track. I found my experience as a music listener and DJ was more important here than slavishly imitating the reference track as evidenced by a statement by JP Braddock.

“Comparative critical analysis of audio in all its forms, especially with reference material, is key. If there’s one thing I always say to new engineers is: “I don’t have any magic skills or secrets that make me a better engineer than you; it’s not the tools I use or knowledge to utilize them. All that you can learn; what is hard to master is the skill of listening.”

(Hepworth-sawyer 2019: 217).

I zeroed the faders before balancing the mix levels so that I was subtracting levels rather than adding loudness levels. I rearranged the track to make a more atmospheric introduction. For the introduction a gain FX insert was used on the Electric Piano track to bring up the level for it in the introduction prior to bringing the gain down again when the introduction ends and goes into the main mix.

Technique 1

I carried out a number of adjustments to the mix equalisation (EQ) being careful to adjust the equalisation in the mix as a whole and compare it to other instruments and the overall balance of the mix.

“Mostly, equalization is done in mix-context. Solving masking or tuning an instrument into the frequency spectrum is done in relation to other instruments.” (IZHAKI 2018: 237)

There was an intrusive vibration sound on the snare that was de-emphasised using equalisation (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 - Snare equalisation



Figure 3 - Cymbal equalisation



Figure 4 - Synth equalisation



Figure 5 - Guitar equalisation

The cymbals had a low range “rumble” bass sound that needed removing (Figure 3). Synth2 had quite a harsh sound that I EQ’ed out at around 2360 Hz so that the synth also fitted better into the

mix (Figure 4) as this brought out the “presence” of the guitars around 2360 Hz by reducing some masking of that frequency range by synth2. I also found that Electric Guitar 2 needed some equalisation to better fit it into the mix (Figure 5). This was just above 1000 Hz which allowed the top end “bark” of the snare drum to stand out more after reducing this same frequency range for the guitar. This fitted in better with my more “funk” sounding rhythm driven nature of the mix. So this approach prevented conflicts of frequency ranges which according to Owsinski is important.

“Frequency juggling is important. You don't EQ everything in the same place. You don't EQ 3k on the vocal and the guitar and the bass and the synth and the piano, because then you have such a buildup there that you have a frequency war going on.” (Owsinski 2017)

Technique 2

The beginning of the “*I hope you can still feel it*” vocal had breath impacts on the mike that were very audible but they resisted removal as they were across a wide frequency range. However using the Multipressor in Logic (a multi band compressor) led to the discovery that with a particular settings the issue could be turned into something that, once it was played in the context of the whole mix became a “feature not a bug” so to speak.



Figure 6 - Multipressor

In other words the multi band compressor altered the breath sounds so they were brought into different loudness and frequency ranges that then had a different relationship to the rest of the mix. However even though that piece of the vocal was not used in the final mix I left the Multipressor with the same settings on the vocals I did use as that made them fit better into the mix as a whole.

I also automated a tape delay on the Stereo Out track after creating a separate track for it. This gave the piece an interesting finish to it.

Compression was also used on the Stereo Out but chained to the Snare to give a more punchy rhythm. I found this also brought the overall mix together which according to Adam Ayan of Gateway Mastering is an important technique.

“Compression is an interesting thing. You can use it to “jack” the RMS level or as a kind of “glue.”” (HEPWORTH-SAWYER 2019: 15)

All tracks were also put through a common reverb bus which further unified the mix.

Conclusion

I felt that I met my aim of producing a more rhythm based “funk” approach to the piece. I managed to bring the piece together into a much more unified composition from otherwise disconnected pieces of audio. As well as improving the overall track arrangement by giving it a more sensitive and emotional opening introduction that set up the atmosphere to emphasise the rhythmic nature of the main parts of the arrangement once they came in. That also included completely removing Synth1 as it initially sounded out of tune but once I started rearranging the track Synth1 simply no longer fitted into the mix and was removed completely.

I felt I could have rearranged the track even more and added more creative effects to it, extra samples and synths. Also there was a small metallic sound at 20 seconds that I did not manage to remove.

This project has highlighted how an understanding of mixing audio as a DJ can be brought into a studio context. However the more extensive and deeper nature of studio mixing requires further experience and research into ways of fitting each instrument frequency into the total mix.

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Figure 5 - Guitar equalisation. June 2023 while using Logic Pro. Screenshot by the author.

Figure 6 - Multiprocessor. June 2023 while using Logic Pro. Screenshot by the author.

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