



www.stardeltamastering.com

## Pre Mastering Advice

In order for us to get the most for you out of your recordings there are a number of things you can do to help optimise the material that you submit.

Please take time to read our mix & submission guidelines thoroughly before submitting any material as these few details can really make the difference between us achieving a very good master and an exceptional one. If you are not the final mix engineer then simply print out this .PDF and discuss it with your engineer before they run the final mixes to be sent to us.

If you have any questions about any of the points mentioned please do not hesitate to email us or call for a discussion.

## Mix & Submission Guidelines

We do our best to work wonders but at the end of the day we are always at the mercy of the material we receive and therefore the more you can have right at source, unhindered by any potentially inferior processing, the more we can ultimately do for you.

These days there are a whole host of so called 'mastering grade' plugins available and a lot of DAW applications offer their own built in processors intended for the purpose. Sadly nearly all of these fall short of the processing quality required to achieve a competitive level without any undesired artifacts.

Therefore the most important thing is to try and adopt a less is more approach and only apply mix bus processing you feel is absolutely essential to the sound. In short, try and leave the mastering until the mastering session.

Check your mix carefully for clicks, pops & sibilance etc. and that you are as satisfied as possible before you submit your work. Everything such as phase correlation, filtration of unwanted sub frequencies, noise reduction, de-essing and volume automation are all things that are best carried out on individual mix elements and not the whole mix whenever possible. We do however have excellent tools for making these adjustments at the mastering stage if there are no other alternatives. In reality the best mix you can have is one that sounds right with no processing at all and all we need to do is set the dynamic range!

## General Mix Levels & Processing

Follow these tips and you should give us the best start possible to optimising your music.

Try and keep peaks on the main mix between -10 to -4dBfs (Digital Full Scale) but no higher than -3 dBfs, If your mix is pushing these limits simply lower the master output fader level. The less headroom you leave us, the less room we have to work within and will only have to turn your mix down to turn it back up again the right way! If in doubt less is always more.

### **Do not normalize files under any circumstances.**

No processing on the master bus, e.g. any loudness maximizing processor or EQ of any kind. Maybe a little compression from a decent outboard device if mixed on a console for specific effect, but no plug-ins please. EQ on the master bus at our end would often be unnecessary if it were not for needing to undo over compensation by the mix engineer (often due to room deficiencies in the mix environment).

If you wish to give us a processed version that you are reasonably happy with as a reference then that is fine and often a useful tool.

It is often a good idea to submit vocal up and down mixes (+/- 0.5 to 2dB) due to the potentially desirable gluing effect of the mastering process, especially for vinyl.

Do not apply any dither or noise shaping to the final mix. Again if this is needed we will apply it in the final stages.



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## **File Formats, Fades, Start / End Points & Submission**

Files should ideally be 24bit 96khz .wav or .aiff, but only if they were recorded at this bit depth and sample rate. Please do not up-sample files as if anything this usually only degrades the audio. In other words stick to the original sample rate but keep that as high as possible.

Make sure all track starts and ends have good bar/few seconds of silence either side and leave topping & tailing until the final master.

The same goes with intro and outro fades. Simply give us the precise fade times and we will perform these at the end of the process.

Submit clearly labeled files. Format should always be stereo interleaved .wav and be they on CD, DVD, USB stick or secure server they must be clearly labeled with artist, track and version info, e.g. JohnDoeSong4VocalUpMix.wav. If submitting any other format such as DAT or 1/2 inch tape please also make sure these are clearly labeled.

Don't entrust your most precious data to a cheap a CD or DVD. Those few extra pence on quality media could make all the difference.

Always try to send two copies of each disc. Nobody wants a wasted day due to corrupted data.

Make sure to include as much information as possible including artist, label and pressing plant info and contacts, album titles, all song titles & correct spellings, track orders and any ISRC, UPC or EAN codes you need encoded as this cannot be added after we have created the master disc.

We can supply your masters back to you as either a DDP image (the industry standard sample accurate data format used by nearly all professional pressing plants), Red Book CD or simply data files sent via our secure server. Please specify your preferred delivery method when confirming your session.

As standard we provide finished digital masters at 16bit 44.1khz but can supply any sample rate or bit depth you require upon request including a superior .mp3 conversion.



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## Notes For Vinyl Customers

Due to the degradation of lacquer discs from the moment they are cut, it is crucial that you have a pressing plant booked and ready to receive them as soon as we dispatch them with our courier. If you need any help with this please do not hesitate to call us.

You will also need to have a matrix/catalogue number from the plant (for processing purposes) ready to be etched on to the disc before dispatch.

Please be aware of both the recommended ideal & maximum side lengths for each size of disc and RPM when cutting at peak levels.

### **12" - 33 1/3 RPM:**

IDEAL - 12 to 14 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 22 minutes per side

### **12" - 45 RPM:**

IDEAL - 9 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 15 minutes per side

### **10" - 33 1/3 RPM**

IDEAL - 9 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 14 minutes per side

### **10" - 45 RPM**

IDEAL - 7 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 11 minutes per side

### **7" - 33 1/3 RPM**

IDEAL - 5 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 9 minutes per side

### **7" - 45 RPM**

IDEAL - 3 minutes per side

MAXIMUM - 6 minutes per side

## **A Few Words On The Loudness War**

For a number of reasons, mainly record labels wanting their record to sound biggest on the radio/TV, there has been a rather sad trend in recent years for ever increasingly 'loud' or crushed/clipped, dynamically devoid masters.

This increase in perceived volume comes at the cost of a loss of clarity, punch and depth as well as poorer stereo imaging and increased distortion. This is particularly problematic with the increasingly popular mp3 format due to the nature of the conversion process.

It is sad because more and more people are growing up thinking that this is how music is supposed to sound. While there is a place for hugely large sounding records, to really make it work it is more often than not a product of a quality writing, arranging and mixing process more than any 'magic bullet' in the mastering.

However as the saying goes "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" and therefore if we are going to war, then we intend to win it! Whether you want louder than the loudest, but without the artifacts associated with 'in the box' mastering or total preservation of every dynamic in a Classical or Jazz recording, we will treat your project with the respect it deserves regardless.