



Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio

By Mike Senior

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Discover how to achieve release-quality mixes even in the smallest studios by applying power-user techniques from the world's most successful producers.

Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio is a down-to-earth primer for small-studio enthusiasts who want chart-ready sonics in a hurry. Drawing on the back-room strategies of more than 100 famous names, this entertaining guide leads you step-by-step through the entire mixing process. On the way, you'll unravel the mysteries of every type of mix processing, from simple EQ and compression through to advanced spectral dynamics and "fairy dust" effects. User-friendly explanations introduce technical concepts on a strictly need-to-know basis, while chapter summaries and assignments are perfect for school and college use.

- Learn the subtle editing, arrangement, and monitoring tactics which give industry insiders their competitive edge, and master the psychological tricks which protect you from all the biggest rookie mistakes.
- Find out where you don't need to spend money, as well as how to make a limited budget really count.
- Pick up tricks and tips from leading-edge engineers working on today's multi-platinum hits, including Michael Brauer, Serban Ghenea, the Lord-Alge brothers, Tony Maserati, Manny Marroquin, Dave "Hard Drive" Pensado, Jack Joseph Puig, Mark "Spike" Stent, Phil Tan, Andy Wallace, and many, many more . . .

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Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio By Mike Senior Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: A Letter from Mike Senior on *Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio*, "The 'Why The Hell' Challenge"



Whenever I read anything about mixing, my first question is this: why the hell should I believe what this person's saying?

It would therefore be daft of me to expect any better treatment. So why *should* you believe me when I say that you can create commercial-grade mixes in a typical small home/college studio?

My first answer to this question is that you can judge for yourself, with your own ears, because dozens of my mixes for *Sound On Sound* magazine's popular "Mix Rescue" column are available free online--there's a taster of some of them on this very page, and lots more available on my own webpage. In all these cases I've started with real-world small-studio recordings and used widely available mass-market technology to remix it to a commercial level, all without ever setting foot inside a "real" studio. Go on, take a listen. If you want that kind of transformation for your music, then you can find a detailed explanation of my method in *Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio*.

The second reason you might want to take notice of these mixing techniques, though, is that they've been drawn not only from my own professional experience, but also from more than four million words of first-hand interviews with the highest-profile engineers and producers on the planet. Whatever you think of my personal advice, it's a bit trickier to dismiss the opinions of 100 of the studio industry's biggest names.

But at the end of the day it's your call: does *Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio* pass your own "why the hell" test? You might just find that it's the only mixing book on the market that actually does . . .

--Mike Senior

Amazon Exclusive: Top Ten Small-Studio Myths--Busted

Amongst many other things in *Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio*, I try to deliver a stout kicking to the following questionable (but surprisingly pervasive) pieces of received wisdom:

You need high-end gear to create commercial-grade mixes.

While great gear makes mixing quicker and easier, it's not a deal-breaker. To demonstrate this, I deliberately do all my "Mix Rescue" remixes for *Sound On Sound* magazine on budget gear in small home/college studios. In some cases, I've even restricted myself to the DAW's built-in plug-ins too--as Greg Kurstin did when mixing Lily Allen's hit record *The Fear*. If you won't take my word for it, though, here's top producer Frank Filipetti: "Your ears, your mind, your musical abilities are what it's all about. Put a George Massenburg, a Hugh Padgham, a Kevin Killen together with any kind of gear, and you'll get a great-sounding record." Tony Visconti is one of many others who back him up: "I've heard people make very bad records on expensive gear. The gear does not dictate the quality. It's how you use it." So I'm afraid that if your mix sucks, your mixing technique sucks. No two ways about it.

Use the speakers with the flattest frequency response.

This isn't actually the most important thing when working under budget constraints, because your ear can adapt to a speaker's frequency balance quite readily. When you've not got much money to buy monitors for mixing, a flat frequency response is much less critical than good time-domain response. Indeed, the two most celebrated mixing speakers of all time, the Yamaha NS10 and the Auratone 5C Super Sound Cube, both have extremely uneven frequency-response plots, but excellent time-domain performance.

Trust your ears.

They may be all you've got to hear with, but if you're going to achieve pro-standard mixes then you should trust your ears about as far as you can stretch them! They will lie to you at every opportunity if you give them half a chance, and you need to stay vigilant to avoid being caught out. Ever had that "morning after" horror of realizing that last night's great-sounding mix actually sounds like a wasp in a tin? Or have you ever carefully adjusted a mix effect for five minutes before realizing the stupid thing isn't actually plugged in? Those common experiences are just the tip of the iceberg, and it's only by learning to work around the fickleness of your own hearing that you can begin to get decent mix results reliably.

Timing/tuning-correction kills the music!

Corrective processing can certainly produce unmusical results, but it's important to realize that it doesn't have to, even if you're just using the editing facilities built into your software DAW. Furthermore, almost every small-studio production I've worked on sounded more musical (and became a lot easier to mix) once careful timing and tuning correction had been applied. And I've yet to have a single client complain about it either!

Start your mix with the drums.

That might work with some mixes, but it's often not the best decision. For example, in a lot of styles you actually want to give the lead vocals the biggest "wow" factor, sonically speaking. In that case, it's much better to start with those while your ears are fresh, and while you've still got lots of mix real estate and computer CPU power to play with.

Try to make every instrument sound its best.

This can be a recipe for disaster at mixdown. The moment you put two instruments together, each will inevitably compromise the quality of the other, and mixing is not just about deciding which instruments need to sound best--it's also about deciding which can afford to sound less good. You may need to make some parts of your mix sound worse in order to make your all-important lead vocal sound better, for instance. As producer John Leckie puts it: "You can't have spectacular everything--then you wonder why the mix doesn't sound any good, because everything's crowding everything else. When you solo the instruments, everything sounds good, but when it's all put together it's a jumbled-up mess, so something's got to give way."

Reverb has to sound natural.

Wrong. Although realistic-sounding room simulation has its place in many mixes, there's a whole lot more to using reverb effects than that. Even the dodgiest-sounding reverb unit can prove extremely handy when enhancing an instrument's tone/decay characteristics, or stereo image. In fact, a lot of the established classic reverb units sound pretty unnatural (the AMS RMX16, say, or the EMT 140 plate), but that doesn't stop them from appearing all over the current charts.

Perhaps it just needs professional mastering? (If only I had the Celestial Systems Mix Perfectizer plugin!)

I call this the "silver bullet" myth--that comforting delusion that the only thing separating your mix from the ones you hear on the radio is some single esoteric process. Well, here's some news: I've heard thousands of real small-studio mixes, as well as remixing dozens of them for "Mix Rescue," and whenever I hear someone utter the silver bullet myth, it's never, ever a single "magic ingredient" that their mix actually needs! The malaise can almost always be traced to a whole selection of minor misjudgments that have been made at various points in the arrangement, editing, and mixing process. In other words, if you improve your basic mixing technique, the "fairy dust" will look after itself.

But you just can't do that!

In mixing the end justifies the means. Whatever you're given to work from, the bottom line is that you're expected to turn it into something that sounds like a finished record. It doesn't matter if you have to replace the drums with samples, stuff synth pads between the guitar layers, add new backing vocals, or remove certain instruments entirely--just as long as your final product sounds great enough to make the client a happy bunny.

Professionals don't make mistakes.

Rubbish. Professionals make mistakes like everyone else, but they turn them to their advantage. "You're going to make mistakes," says Humberto Gatica. "The important thing is to learn from them." Mixing in particular is one long experiment, in which mistakes play a vital role by identifying any mixing tactics that are unsuitable for the job at hand. For this reason professional engineers at the highest level will cheerfully scrap a mix completely and redo it. "I will often restart mixes three or four times," reveals Fabian Marasciullo. "Put everything back to zero and try again, re-blend and EQ everything." Justin Niebank doesn't think twice about heading back to the drawing board either: "I'm not afraid to pull all the faders back down again if it doesn't work. That's too great a hurdle for many engineers: but if necessary, don't get precious, and start over."

Review

*In the good old days, new engineers learned to mix by interning or assisting; that's less and less the case these days. Think of this book as a textbook alternative to a year of assisting. If you've been figuring out everything yourself or piecing together your workflow based on internet forum posts, this book may bump your work forward by months or years. —Scott Evans, **Tape Op Magazine***

The advice and guidance contained are relevant to everyone involved in music engineering and production, at all levels and regardless of the size of the studio or its facilities. Novices and grandmasters alike will find plenty of interest here. The emphasis is very much on mastering the correct approaches and techniques, rather than how to use any specific equipment or software, and everything is described in such a way as to make it easily transferable across any DAW platform or even to a traditional console-based mix environment.. The book is structured in a progressive fashion, following a logical mixing workflow, and

developing and building on ideas and techniques throughout. The book is very readable, in Mike's familiar, approachable and often humorous style, and with plenty of illustrations, all of which maintain the interest from cover to cover. The text also expands on Mike's own wealth of experience and knowledge with numerous relevant quotes and opinions from over 100 of the world's best-known engineers and producers. Many books have been published about mixing, but in all honesty I'd say *Mixing Secrets* is easily the most practical, complete and ultimately satisfying that I've read so far. It is eminently readable (even if the spellings have been 'Americanised!'), with the emphasis always on helping the reader to understand when and why to use a particular technique, before explaining how in great practical detail. Although the content is wonderfully disciplined and technically rigorous, the explanations are never intimidating to a beginner, yet remain stimulating to the more experienced reader. The icing on the cake, and liberally covered in cherries, is the dedicated web site, which provides a phenomenal resource of useful material and information. This is a definite must-read for everyone involved in music production at any level - and at a bargain price. --**Sound on Sound magazine**

The most useful, up-to-date and comprehensive book I've read on the labyrinthine subject of mixing music.. Author Mike Senior is well equipped with his experience as engineer, producer and journalist for *Sound-on-Sound* magazine to guide any reader, with an intermediate to advanced understanding of the studio recording and mixing process, through four main sections.. Many good examples of current and popular CDs are given through this book to 'reference' each step in the mixing process. *Mixing Secrets for the Small Studio* is a 'must have' for me that I wil re-read from time to time and I cannot recommend it more. --**Music Connection magazine**

Mike shares many of his own mixing tips, supplemented by tips and advice from some of the industry's top engineers that range from Chris and Tom Lord Alge to Andy Wallace. At more than 300 pages, it's quite a read, but a highly recommended one. In fact the book is filled with so much great stuff, it's a book that one can read again and again and that can be used as a handy manual during any mixing project. And though there's plenty of information to soak up, Mike has made it very easy to navigate your way through the book and to find the relevant information you need quickly and easily. --**GuitarWorld.com**

Mixing Secrets by Mike Senior is a great book for studio production, no doubt about it. It's also a great book for extracting concepts that can be used for live audio production. And for the church audio sound tech who might get an email next week saying "we need you to record and produce our first praise music CD," well, you aren't going to find a better book on perfecting a mix. It starts as a book but you will use it as a resource. That's a win-win in my book. --**BehindTheMixer.com**

I FOUND AN EXCELLENT "MUST HAVE" for anyone pursuing music recording and mixing as a career and life-long hobby...[Senior's] book does not disappoint. He's a great writer and I thoroughly recommend it for newbies and oldbies! --**Mavens of Media**

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