

Bruce Swedien Tipps

Ques - 1. Background Vocals: What's a typical treatment? Delays, harmonizer, cross delay etc.??? Different treatments for different harmonies? How to create a good R&B background sound?

Ans - I always try to think of how a record that I am doing will sound ten years from now. Will a processing device of today make it sound hopelessly dated in the future? I realize that that is hard to judge and I have no crystal ball to listen to. Think of it like this, it would be like doing a recording ten years ago and using one to many wah-wah pedals on the guitar parts. Don't put one to many processors on the music just because the effects are in the control room.

By keeping the musical 'sense' of a piece of music uppermost in our minds, the music that we record today will sound just as good years from now as it does to us today.

Now I'll try and be as direct as I can with this answer. Here is an explanation of how I would record a vocal group of four or five singers. The singers are positioned facing each other. The mikes are placed close together, back to back about four inches apart or less. This method of keeping the mikes close together allows some mixing of sound to occur acoustically. It also gives good phase coherency so that when the mix is heard monaurally there will be no change in balance or quality.(Phase coherency is achieved by keeping the mikes close together so that the sound sources arrive at the two mikes at about the same point in time thus minimizing phase distortion.)

I will record a basic vocal track using two channels of the multi-track recording device, one mike on each track. I would then ask the singers to step back from the mikes about two feet or so and record a "stack" or double of the original part. This also would be recorded in discrete stereo on two channels of the multi-track. It is very important to carefully watch the volume levels of the individual vocal tracks. Keep the levels on the individual vocal tracks as consistent as possible. By having the singers step back from the mikes during this vocal pass, in order to

keep the track levels consistent, we are forced to raise the volume level of the two mikes on this pass, thus giving greater acoustical support to the sound.

Very often, in vocal recording, I hear a lot of single, monaural tracks merely panned either left or right in a half-hearted attempt at stereo sound. All this really creates is left and right mono and has nothing to do with the support of music.

I call this technique "Two-Channel Monaural". "Two-Channel Monaural" has absolutely nothing to do with stereo recording and affords little or no acoustical support to the recording. The additional effort and planning required to preserve real stereo and the acoustical support it provides is well worth it. Frequently when recording vocal duets, I will look for microphones for the vocalists that have an obviously different sonic character. This difference in microphone character will add to the already different timber of the two voices and make the resulting sonic picture more fascinating.

Ques - 2. Drums: What's some of your favorite reverb treatments for drums? Types, pre-delays, lengths? How much do you high pass you cymbals/hats?

Ans - My favorite reverb for drums is my AMS - RMX. I will normally use the ambience program with about a 100ms pre-delay to allow the early reflections to be heard. I generally use a high-pass setting of about 100 hz for all drums except the kick....

Ques - 3. Lead Vocals: Do you prefer close micing or micing from a distance? Examples? What reverb would you throw up on say a 75bpm vocal ballad? Pre-delay, time, early reflections? Plate? Hall? What's your favorite reverb for lead vox?

Ans - Generally speaking, I love close miking for lead vocals. My favorite reverbs for lead vocals are my EMT 250 or my EMT 252. I also use my Lexicon 480L pr my Lexicon 224XL.

Ques - 4. Mix Bus: I often find that carving a little 1k from the entire mix often warms up my digital recordings a little. When mixing digitally do you ever eq the mix bus? If so give us an example?

Ans - I almost never EQ the mix buss. Those of you who have been to my lectures or seminars already know that I use little or no limiting or compression!

Thanks for your good questions. Later....

I had to respond to this because it's very interesting, and it shows that at least there are a few in this forum that are truly interested in high-quality music recording - - ->"100ms pre delay on drums sounds surprising. When I use a long pre-delay on drums I usually get a noticeable and undesirable "slapback" effect. There must be a generous amount of early reflection in that to smooth that over or is the reverb attack somehow muted?"

Answer ->100 ms is close to the SHORTEST reverb pre-delay that I would use! More often than not, my pre-delay amount would be in the order of 125 to 132 ms! Try that setting for pre-delay on vocal or orchestral parts as well....

The reverb attack is NEVER muted!!!

Here's what happens.... (I'll start by saying that you need a pretty nice acoustical space to record in.)

Early reflections are something that I have always considered "The Forgotten Factor" of acoustical support, when it comes to high quality music recording. (Except in my recordings! I always give early reflections a great deal of thought and consideration).....

The thing that is always apparent to my ear is that the quality of early reflections when generated in a room is quite different - (And vastly superior) to the so-called "early reflections" that would be generated artificially.(If you can)

So, if we have well-recorded sound sources, with good 'Early reflections', what you want to do is to open up the PDL, or make the PDL larger in number, to accommodate the early reflections. If you have done a good job of recording your sound-source, if you don't have PDL in the reverb you'll mask these beautiful early reflections. And those early reflections are a very important component of sound, very important.

Our ability, as music listeners to localize the direction and to form some judgment of the distance that we are from a sound source, under ordinary conditions of listening, is really a matter of common experience, so when we listen directly to an orchestra, we form a sense of spacial relation to the instruments of the orchestra. And to me this has always meant that this spacial character of the sound gives to the music a sense of depth and extensiveness. It's what I would call an attempt to preserve the music in true auditory perspective, so this makes it necessary for us to record some sort of stereophonic reproduction not merely virtual left right intensity differences, but a sense of space.

I've always felt that to me music is three dimensional. Recorded music in order to be interesting and different sounding to the ear, from ordinary music recordings, must have three dimensions not just two dimensions. The dimensions are of course, left, right but the third dimension is depth. This is the most difficult to achieve in modern recording, so it is imperative that it be there. If it isn't, the sound tends to be very monochrome and very dull and uninteresting.

Unfortunately most of recorded sound falls into that category, but it is possible to achieve depth and width at the same time.

This is a subject that I feel very passionate about. It would take too much time and space to go into now....(In addition, from what you have been posting here and elsewhere, I don't know if your collective heart is in the right place. You folks seem to talk alot about the hype and the baloney!!! Is that all you can think about?)

I could go on, but.....

Bruce Swedien

Ques - 1. Background Vocals: What's a typical treatment? Delays, harmonizer, cross delay etc.??? Different treatments for different harmonies? How to create a good R&B background sound?

Ans - I always try to think of how a record that I am doing will sound ten years from now. Will a processing device of today make it sound hopelessly dated in the future? I realize that that is hard to judge and I have no crystal ball to listen to. Think of it like this, it would be like doing a recording ten years ago and using one to many wah-wah pedals on the guitar parts. Don't put one to many processors on the music just because the effects are in the control room.

By keeping the musical 'sense' of a piece of music uppermost in our minds, the music that we record today will sound just as good years from now as it does to us today.

Now I'll try and be as direct as I can with this answer. Here is an explanation of how I would record a vocal group of four or five singers. The singers are positioned facing each other. The mikes are placed close together, back to back about four inches apart or less. This method of keeping the mikes close together allows some mixing of sound to occur acoustically. It also gives good phase coherency so that when the mix is heard monaurally there will be no change in balance or quality.(Phase coherency is achieved by keeping the mikes close together so that the sound sources arrive at the two mikes at about the same point in time thus minimizing phase distortion.)

I will record a basic vocal track using two channels of the multi-track recording device, one mike on each track. I would then ask the singers to step back from the mikes about two feet or so and record a "stack" or double of the original part. This also would be recorded in discrete stereo on two channels of the multi-track. It is very important to carefully watch the volume levels of the individual vocal

tracks. Keep the levels on the individual vocal tracks as consistent as possible. By having the singers step back from the mikes during this vocal pass, in order to keep the track levels consistent, we are forced to raise the volume level of the two mikes on this pass, thus giving greater acoustical support to the sound.

Very often, in vocal recording, I hear a lot of single, monaural tracks merely panned either left or right in a half-hearted attempt at stereo sound. All this really creates is left and right mono and has nothing to do with the support of music.

I call this technique "Two-Channel Monaural". "Two-Channel Monaural" has absolutely nothing to do with stereo recording and affords little or no acoustical support to the recording. The additional effort and planning required to preserve real stereo and the acoustical support it provides is well worth it. Frequently when recording vocal duets, I will look for microphones for the vocalists that have an obviously different sonic character. This difference in microphone character will add to the already different timber of the two voices and make the resulting sonic picture more fascinating.

Ques - 2. Drums: What's some of your favorite reverb treatments for drums? Types, pre-delays, lengths? How much do you high pass you cymbals/hats?

Ans - My favorite reverb for drums is my AMS - RMX. I will normally use the ambience program with about a 100ms pre-delay to allow the early reflections to be heard. I generally use a high-pass setting of about 100 hz for all drums except the kick....

Ques - 3. Lead Vocals: Do you prefer close micing or micing from a distance? Examples? What reverb would you throw up on say a 75bpm vocal ballad? Pre-delay, time, early reflections? Plate? Hall? What's your favorite reverb for lead vox?

Ans - Generally speaking, I love close miking for lead vocals. My favorite reverbs for lead vocals are my EMT 250 or my EMT 252. I also use my Lexicon 480L pr

my Lexicon 224XL.

Ques - 4. Mix Bus: I often find that carving a little 1k from the entire mix often warms up my digital recordings a little. When mixing digitally do you ever eq the mix bus? If so give us an example?

Ans - I almost never EQ the mix buss. Those of you who have been to my lectures or seminars already know that I use little or no limiting or compression!

Thanks for your good questions. Later....

I had to respond to this because it's very interesting, and it shows that at least there are a few in this forum that are truly interested in high-quality music recording - - ->"100ms pre delay on drums sounds surprising. When I use a long pre-delay on drums I usually get a noticeable and undesirable "slapback" effect. There must be a generous amount of early reflection in that to smooth that over or is the reverb attack somehow muted?"

Answer ->100 ms is close to the SHORTEST reverb pre-delay that I would use! More often than not, my pre-delay amount would be in the order of 125 to 132 ms! Try that setting for pre-delay on vocal or orchestral parts as well....

The reverb attack is NEVER muted!!!

Here's what happens.... (I'll start by saying that you need a pretty nice acoustical space to record in.)

Early reflections are something that I have always considered "The Forgotten Factor" of acoustical support, when it comes to high quality music recording. (Except in my recordings! I always give early reflections a great deal of thought and consideration).....

The thing that is always apparent to my ear is that the quality of early reflections

when generated in a room is quite different - (And vastly superior) to the so-called "early reflections" that would be generated artificially.(If you can)

So, if we have well-recorded sound sources, with good 'Early reflections", what you want to do is to open up the PDL, or make the PDL larger in number, to accommodate the early reflections. If you have done a good job of recording your sound-source, if you don't have PDL in the reverb you'll mask these beautiful early reflections. And those early reflections are a very important component of sound, very important.

Our ability, as music listeners to localize the direction and to form some judgment of the distance that we are from a sound source, under ordinary conditions of listening, is really a matter of common experience, so when we listen directly to an orchestra, we form a sense of spacial relation to the instruments of the orchestra. And to me this has always meant that this spacial character of the sound gives to the music a sense of depth and extensiveness. It's what I would call an attempt to preserve the music in true auditory perspective, so this makes it necessary for us to record some sort of stereophonic reproduction not merely virtual left right intensity differences, but a sense of space.

I've always felt that to me music is three dimensional. Recorded music in order to be interesting and different sounding to the ear, from ordinary music recordings, must have three dimensions not just two dimensions. The dimensions are of course, left, right but the third dimension is depth. This is the most difficult to achieve in modern recording, so it is imperative that it be there. If it isn't, the sound tends to be very monochrome and very dull and uninteresting.

Unfortunately most of recorded sound falls into that category, but it is possible to achieve depth and width at the same time.

This is a subject that I feel very passionate about. It would take too much time and space to go into now....(In addition, from what you have been posting here and elsewhere, I don't know if your collective heart is in the right place. You folks

seem to talk alot about the hype and the baloney!!! Is that all you can think about?)

I could go on, but.....

Bruce Swedien