

DIY Mastering

By Fett, Azalea Music Group, Nashville



Setting context: mastering vs. mixing

- Different mindset
- Different level of work
- Different listening skills
- Probably different tools (though not completely necessary)
- Same goals
 - Serve the music
 - CWELMEI: Connect With the End Listener with Maximum Emotional Impact

Tips for successful home studio/DIY mastering

- Helps to not mix and master at the same time in the same project (i.e., master bus)
- At a minimum, helps to do mastering in in a separate DAW project file than mix
- Preferably, do mastering using different software than DAW (e.g., Steinberg's WaveLab mastering platform and/or iZotope's Ozone mastering suite)

Tips for successful home studio/DIY mastering

- Do mastering at a different time than mixing
 - And all other production activities, i.e., make it a dedicated task
 - Preferably even on a different day (set aside “mastering day” & get into a groove)
- Take LOTS of breaks!

Since we're talking "DIY" mastering specifically

- Let's assume...
 - Done in home studio, not a "mastering studio"
 - Done with home studio gear, not "mastering gear"
 - Therefore, a software-only environment
 - Little to NO investment of money

Tools-wise, the heart of mastering is the “Mastering Chain”

- Very typical Mastering Chain elements
 1. Analog Warmth
 2. EQ
 3. Compression
 4. Stereo Widening
 5. Limiting
 6. Dithering
- Might use only one (e.g., just Limiting), all, or any subset for a given mastering project
- Can be in ANY order (but Dithering should ALWAYS be last)

The “Mastering Chain”

- Multiple ways to implement
 - Stock plug-ins in your DAW (whether “mastering” plug-ins or not)
 - 3rd-party plug-ins (possibly combined with stock) in your DAW
 - Dedicated mastering plug-ins/suites in your DAW
 - Dedicated mastering plug-ins/suites outside your DAW
 - Under mastering platform
 - As standalone program

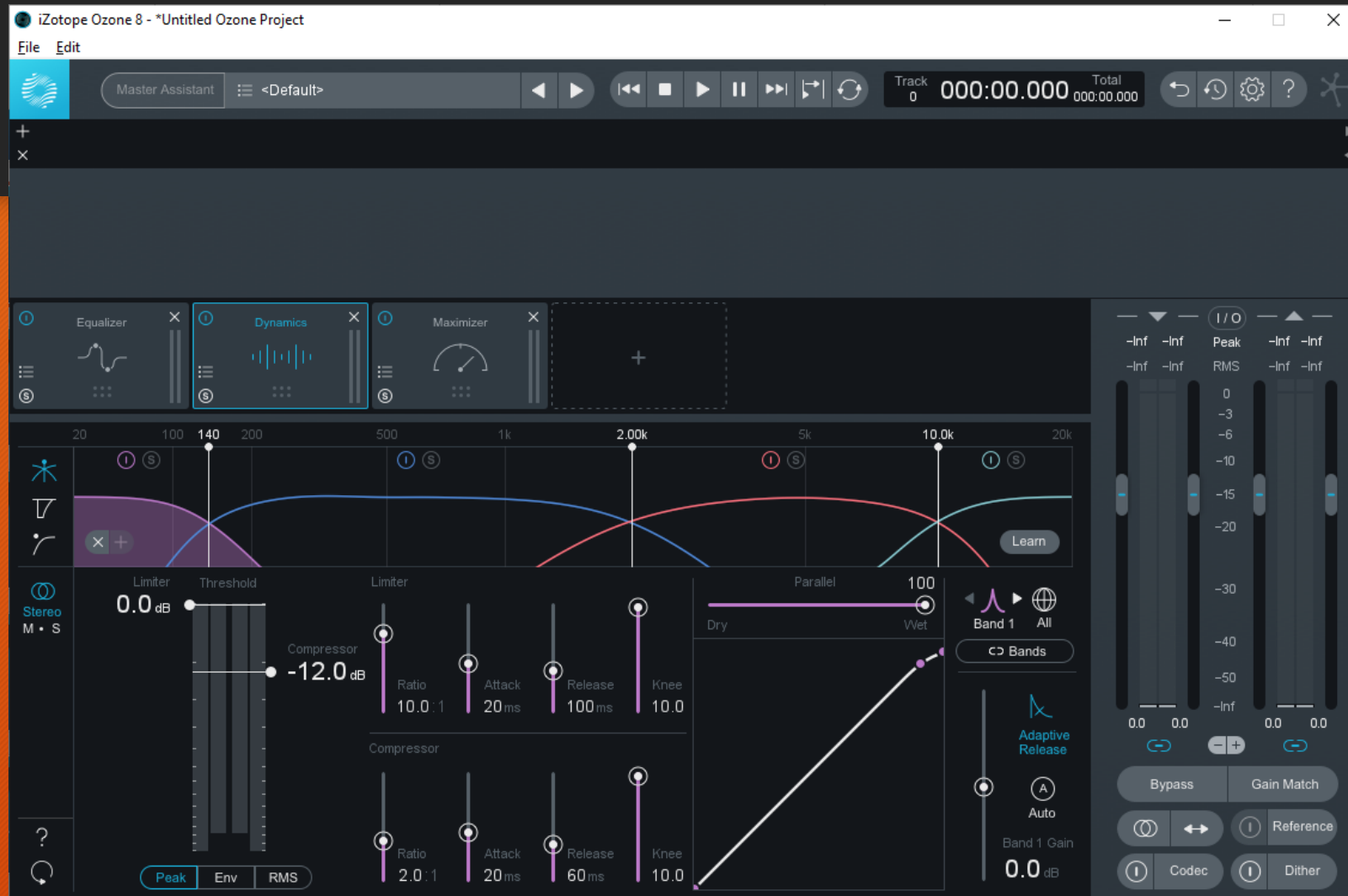
The “Mastering Chain” (cont.)

- ALL are equally “valid” approaches!
- However you do it, make sure to
 - Listen a LOT (more than making changes)
 - Take notes at every stage

One of my favorite (and very popular) tools: Ozone from iZotope

- Very powerful and comprehensive
- Very flexible
- Great modular design
- Very easy to use, IF YOU'RE WILLING TO TAKE THE TIME AND DEVELOP THE SKILLS
- Has ridiculously good, high-quality Presets to get you started
- Insider secret: many modern “mastering houses” use only Ozone

Ozone's Interface



Using Presets

- Today's software plug-in presets are very powerful
 - Lots of effort made in getting them right
 - Often very useful names
 - Can help “get you much of the way there” by saving you
 - Lots of time
 - Lots of effort
- **HOWEVER**, they're NOT “magic bullet!”

Ozone Presets

- Many presets in several categories:
 - All-purpose
 - Genre-specific
 - Instruments and busses
 - Signature presets
- Spend a ton of time going through, listening to, and studying settings of every one of them
- Then, expect to have to tweak them for a given situation
 - Wash out for and address negative, unintended side-effects of using Presets
 - Definitely NOT one-size fits all

Ozone Presets



Ozone Presets (cont.)

- Will teach you
 - How to use Ozone itself
 - A LOT about the mastering process and its effect on the sound of a production
- You'll end up developing your own
 - Set of “go-to” presets for certain sounds
 - Comprehensive set of custom presets for you own work

Real-world examples using Ozone

- Imaginary, 4-song singer/songwriter EP (using real-world artist releases)
 - Carol and Dale: “Be Here Now”
 - from the album *Be Here Now* (Americana)
 - Will Kimble: “Grandpa’s Farm”
 - from the album *Instrument I Like* (Bluegrass)
 - Mark Aaron James: “Stamford Time”
 - from the album *MAJik Stick* (Pop)
 - Phoebe Elliot: “This Is Who I Am”
 - from the album *This Is Who I Am* (Pop)

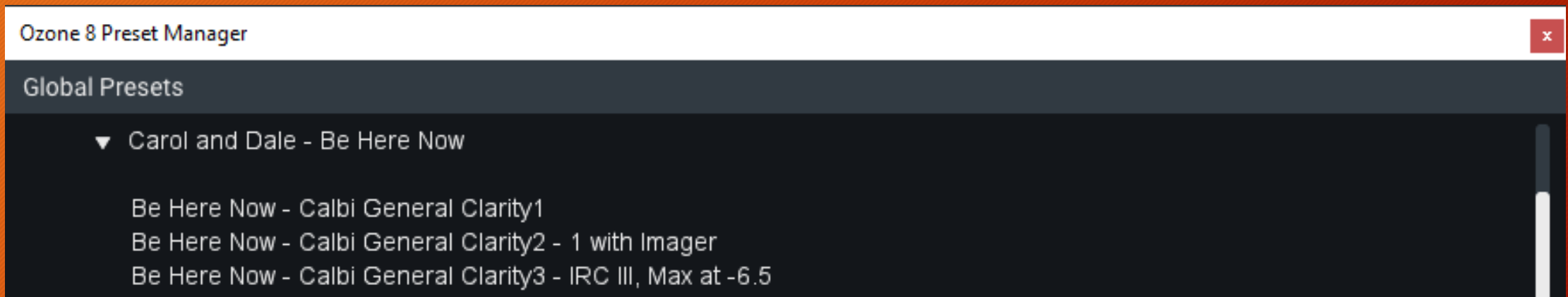
Real-world examples using Ozone (cont.)

- Let's see if we can do a good job of mastering using ONLY Ozone Presets...
- *** THIS IS NOT “THE WAY” TO MASTER, OR “THE RIGHT WAY” TO MASTER, JUST AN EXAMPLE OF ONE APPROACH!!! ***

Starting Ozone Presets

- Carol and Dale: “Be Here Now”
 - Starting Ozone Preset: Signature - Greg Calbi - General Clarity
- Will Kimble: “Grandpa’s Farm”
 - Starting Ozone Preset: Genre-Specific - Neo Soul
- Mark Aaron James: “Stamford Time”
 - Starting Ozone Preset: Signature - Greg Calbi - High Definition Compressed
- Phoebe Elliot: “This Is Who I Am” from the album
 - Starting Ozone Preset: All-Purpose - Gentle Exciting

Evolving your own Ozone Presets - example



Using Ozone Presets

- Listen a LOT to the music and what it needs
- Audition Ozone preset list while listening
- Choose a starting preset that gets you close
- Make modifications to match the music at hand
- Save each change to settings as a new, Custom Preset

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