# Using Automation to Take Your Mixes From *Good* to *Great*

Presented by Fett
Cacapehon Retreat
May, 2024

# Wanna Follow The Slides On Your Own Device?

www.AzaleaMusic.com/Cacapehon2024

# What's a Fett…?

- Independent producer/engineer, Azalea Studios, Nashville
- Co-founder and owner of Azalea Music Group, Nashville
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com
- Former Technology Editor for *Performing Songwriter* magazine
- Creator & host of Empowering Women In Audio clinics
  - www.EmpoweringWomenInAudio.com
- Coach & mentor
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com/fetts-production-booster-program
- Author
  - *Fett's Mixing Roadmap: A Step-by-step Guide to Mixing In The Studio* (Amazon.com)
- Teacher: online video courses in recording, mixing, mastering, etc.
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com/Programs

# Some general uses for automation

- To complement / enhance ebb and flow of a song arrangement
- Implies movement / variation throughout course of mix
- Can add “drama” and special, attention-(re)grabbing moments to a mix
- Address problems that might otherwise make the recording unusable, or be very difficult to address in other ways
- Both a creative tool with a wide “palate” (like artist’s brush strokes), besides just being a utility or problem-solver

# Some uses for VOLUME automation

- “Rides” of track volumes
  - General volume up and down during different sections of song
    - Great examples: solo instrument/few instruments intro to song UP, 1st couple of words or line of vocal DOWN
  - More “surgical,” momentary volume up and down as a substitute / in combination with compressor, for smoother results
    - Great examples: lead vocal, instrumental solos, esp. guitar
- Fade-out of entire mix at end of song

# Some uses for VOLUME automation

- Momentary changes of stereo master volume to control peaks going into master bus / mastering processors, for smoother, less heavy-handed results
  - (E.g., with compression or limiting across entire mix, for just a couple of peaks)
- Cleaning up noises at very end of specific notes, chords, or end of mix (notorious), using different types of fade curves
  - Often much more effective / natural than just muting, gating, or cutting out parts of audio

# Some uses for MUTE automation

- Turning parts in arrangement on and off during course of mix
- Turning off noisy parts of tracks where no music occurs (alternative / complement of gating, deleting, riding volume)

# Some uses for EQ automation

- Changing / maintaining tone of vocal & instrumental tracks as different parts and / or areas of instrument are played throughout a mix
  - Brightening up vocals in chorus vs. other sections of song, for more “energy”
  - Snare side stick vs. open stick
  - Guitar picking vs. strumming, or different pick / finger positions on neck and body
- Creating special effects for different sections of song
  - “Telephone voice” on lead vocal (a classic!) Beatles “Yellow Submarine” & Wings “Admiral Halsey” (We’re so sorry, Uncle Albert), Joe Walsh “Life’s Been Good To Me So Far” (main parts of entire lead vocal – opposite of how normally used)

# Some uses for EQ automation

- More “surgical,” momentary changes, often to address problems, while still keeping overall EQ consistent
  - Momentary bumps / foot tapping of mic stand, pick noise, particularly loud string squeaks vocal pops, etc.
    - Can time perfectly to ONLY the occurrence of problem
  - Making different-sounding punch-ins consistent with original audio, for
    - Different recording setups, distance from mic, etc.
    - Changes in voice from day to day (or even hour to hour)
      - Good example: 1 line of Gordon Lustig “My Dad” song

# Some uses for Panning automation

- “Moving” performers / parts to different parts of the “stage” throughout course of the song
  - Solo instrument to center stage
  - Temporary splitting of doubled lead vocals to sides (e.g., during bridge), then back to middle
- Having entire arrangement “collapse into mono” for dramatic moment(s) in arrangement
- Fixing problems
  - Performer moves between stereo mics while playing
    - Especially prevalent with acoustic guitar – panning in opposite direction of movement can be seamless (Tommy Emmanuel!)

# Some uses for Reverb/Delay/FX automation

- Changing “size” or “distance” of vocal & instrumental tracks as song arrangement progresses
  - Making choruses “bigger” and verses “smaller”
  - Controlling “intimacy” of parts in different song sections
- Adding different “textures” to different song sections
  - Swirling or spacey sounds (e.g., Doobie Brothers “Listen To The Music” bridge effect)
- Creating dramatic effect / “punctuation” on specific lyrics, band dynamics
  - Repeating echo of only key words in vocal
  - Band stabs, stops, holds
  - Creating “dry ending” for songs that end abruptly

# Other types of automation

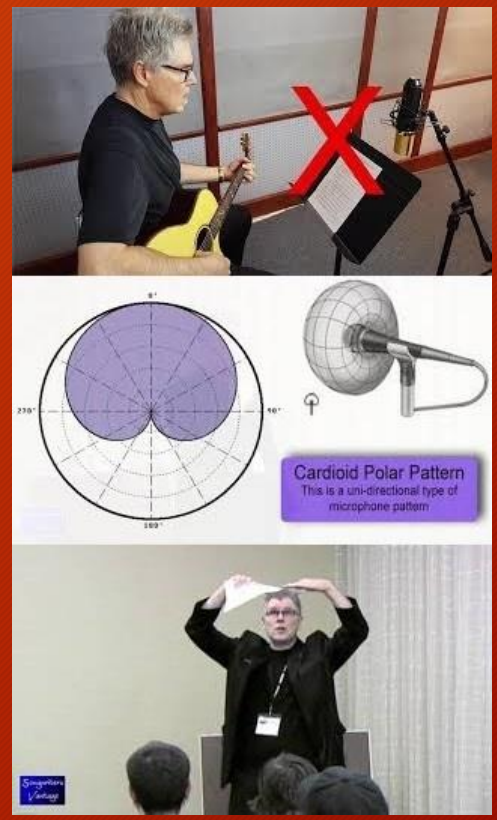
- In addition to an audio track's or channel's overall parameters, we can now automate virtual every single individual control on most of today's
  - Plug-in controls
  - Virtual instrument settings
  - MIDI-specific parameters (velocity, note on/off, sustain, expression, etc.)
- In addition to making gradual adjustments, also makes "instant patch change/preset recall" possible

# Combining different types of automation

- Can make very difficult-to-achieve results possible
- Making different sections of song / parts of arrangement radically different, instantaneously
  - Having effects (esp. reverb) come and go, ebb and flow, appear and disappear instantly (for dramatic effect)
    - Total dryness of breakdown section
  - Lower dry volume of vocal while raising reverb send level, esp. at end of song (fading into the distance)

# Want to go a LOT deeper than this…?

- *Fett's Online Courses*
  - *100% o*nline
  - Available anytime, from anywhere
  - Video-based, self-paced
  - All materials are 100% downloadable
    - For LIFETIME access
- *Available at [www.AzaleaMusic.com/programs](www.AzaleaMusic.com/programs)*
  - *Recording Turbo-charge (very comprehensive)*
  - *Layering*
  - *Mixing Mastering*
  - *Ninja Mastering*




2024 Cacapehon Retreat © 2024 by Fett, Azalea Music Group, Nashville