

The art of Mastering



Mastering has long been recognized as belonging to the art of audio business where the highest sonic expertise meets the best technical equipment. Done right, mastering can lead to musical and sonic results not thought to be possible during the production process. However, it takes more than just „good“ sounding equipment and a freaky sound engineer to reach long term success. Maarten de Boer must be doing it right. He is the owner of the Netherland based mastering suite „The Masters“, successfully on this market for more than twenty years. Norbert Lehmann (**Lehmannaudio**) interviews Maarten de Boer.

NL: When did you start your mastering studio and how did things develop after that?

MdB: I started out in 1982 with a disc-cutting room. I was sound engineer and owner of a 24-track recording studio but mastering was practically non-existing in The Netherlands and I wanted to change that. At that time I felt that there were already too many studios in Holland and so I decided to start a dedicated mastering studio. This made me the first independent mastering room in The Netherlands. I suppose you can say that every disc-cutting engineer in the Eighties became a CD mastering engineer as well. They all came with the same kind of experience. Now the expertise is still there but you have to look for it and it doesn't come free anymore.

NL: Do you discuss your experiences with colleagues from other mastering studios? Is there a kind of scene?

MdB: Yes of course I talk to colleagues. There is also a Web forum where engineers talk and discuss mat-

ters. Internet has made it possible to talk to colleagues all over the world instantly. What used to be a small scene has become a world scene. It provides you with valuable information and you can exchange thoughts on various items and problems. We are all using the same equipment and therefore encounter the same problems.

NL: How many recordings have you mastered so far?

MdB: I'm in this business for almost 25 years and this means that literally thousands of recordings have passed through my studio. Now in the Eighties and Nineties I did a lot of factory work apart from the true mastering. Nowadays this is a lot less and the work is orientated towards projects. The consequence is less titles but longer hours which is fine by me.

NL: Could you name some prominent customers/recordings from the last time?

MdB: Dutch artists and labels are

not well known abroad but I work for all the major labels. Candy Dulfer for BMG might ring a bell. The late Herman Brood for Sony. Polydor and Virgin are amongst my clients as well. The internationally well-known Jazz label Criss Cross Jazz is doing its digital mastering and editing at The Masters already for more than fifteen years.

NL: How did the percentage of analog mastering for vinyl develop within the last years?

MdB: In the beginning of the Nineties there was a drop of almost 60 % for vinyl mastering and of course that was expected. To my surprise it didn't go down after that but stayed at the same level, mainly because of Dance music. DJ's were heavily devoted to Vinyl and this kept it going. Now in 2005 it is decreasing slightly but I'm cutting more and more audiophile material for release on vinyl. Anyway very often with CD mastering I have to go analogue as well. Believe me it helps.

NL: Are there more artist contacting you directly or more major labels?

MdB: Originally the majority of work came from the record companies. The past years there is a definite shift towards independent production companies owned by producers and artists. Internet has provided artists with the possibility to sell their albums directly to the public. That makes them the record company. Because of this I receive more and more work through the net. Unexpectedly it means a higher quality. They used to record their CD-Rs in a rather unprofessional way and in some cases this is mildly put. With downloading I receive the material as data straight from their servers. This gives you a true clone because its data not sound. A whole lot better than the CD-R's.

NL: What does your current loudspeaker monitoring consist of?

MdB: B&W 808 loudspeakers are driven by Bryston Amps in a two-way configuration, with 800 watts per side for the low end and 600 watts per side for the mid/top. All amps are bridged mono and are receiving a full bandwidth signal, which is split on the internal passive crossovers in the 808's. The speakers are flush mounted for

optimal reproduction. The Master Room itself was designed by S. W. Davies Ltd. in London. Sean Davies, the designer, is a specialist in designing Mastering Studios. He designed the room for analysis and accuracy and succeeded in both. His company is also responsible for quite a few other studio's in London and abroad, amongst them Sony Mastering in London and in the Netherlands and EMI in Hayes. Going for character and musicality is nice but doesn't tell you much about what really is going on. There should be at least one place that lets you hear how it really sounds. As the mastering is the last place to make decisions, this is where that should be.

NL: Having a look at your sophisticated room acoustics and your loudspeakers, how important is headphone monitoring for you?

MdB: Although headphone monitoring is not a primary issue in my work I regularly need it for detailed checks on clicks and ticks and also for critical editing in classical music. But the major thing is I use your Black Cube Linear as the main pre-amp for the monitoring system. A major audiophile label in the Netherlands

called STS-digital recommended it to me. It is stunning and it absolutely gives me "what you hear is what you get" and that 's all I want. ■

The Masters equipment list:

B&W 808 loudspeakers
Bryston 4B and 3B amps
Lehmann audio Black Cube Linear headphone/monitoring pre-amp
Weiss BW102 Mastering console
Weiss ADC1 MkII 96 Khz AD converter
Weiss DAC1 96 Khz DA converter
Weiss SFC2 double sample frq. Converter
Weiss POW-R noise shaper
Sadie 4 24-96 DAW
Ortofon CPS disc-cutting pre-amp and Equalizer
ETEC DBTL dynamic bass and treble limiter
Ortofon GO 741 cutting amps (600 watts)
Ortofon 742 and 821 cutter heads
Neumann VMS special
Cedar DC1 declicker
Z-sys 8-8 distribution system
Marantz CD10 cd-player
Sony PCM 7010 DAT recorder
Tascam DA30 DAT recorders
Studer RC80 ¼ " master recorder
Studer A80 ½ " master recorder
Various Noise Reduction systems
Dolby B/ A / SR, DBX, Telcom
Sony PCM 1630
Sony DMR4000 U-matic
Sony DTA1000 verifier
Keith Monks Record Cleaning machine
Technics SP10 MkII turntable with:
SME 3009 MkII
Ortofon Jubilee Moving Coil cartridge

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Maarten de Boer cutting with the lathe

„There should be at least one place that lets you hear how it really sounds.“

Maarten de Boer, The Masters

To reach that goal, Netherland's most experienced independant mastering studio relies on the Black Cube Linear as the main pre-amp and for critical headphone monitoring. Hear why.



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