

How to Avoid the Seven Characteristics of an Amateur Sound Team

1. Inconsistent Levels

"Instrument levels that vary from balanced to too soft or too loud or lyrics that can't be distinguished. Once again, a newbie mixer usually sets the faders and forgets them, but mixing is just as dynamic as the music. Every note of every solo and every word of the vocal must be heard. Even with automation as sophisticated as it is these days, it still takes some time and a critical ear to be sure that everything is heard."

2. No Contrast

"The same musical textures are used throughout the entire song. This is generally an arrangement issue, which the mixer can affect somewhat since mixing is so much more than balancing. It's influencing the arrangement by what you mute, emphasize or lower in the mix."

Adding contrast means you need to be an active mixer. For example, during the bridge of a song, add some high EQ boost to the cymbals to make them pop out in the mix. Another example is bringing the backup singers closer to the front of the mix in the chorus. This could be done with volume and effects changes.

3. Frequent Lack of a Focal Point

"There are holes between lyrics where nothing is brought forward in the mix to hold the listener's attention. Granted, this is an arrangement issue too, but it's your job as a mixer to find some point of interest and emphasize it."

Bring up the volume of the lead guitarist between verses or definitely in any instrumental passage. Think of a song as a continuous story. You don't want the story to stop at any time, so keep it going by bringing in instruments to take over when the singing stops for a significant period of time.

4. Mixes That Are Noisy

"Clicks, hums, extraneous noises, count-offs, and sometimes lip-smacks and breaths are all things that the listener finds distracting. It may be a pain to eliminate these distractions but you've got to do it to take the mix to where it has to be."

This is where you really have to know how the band performs a song. The audience doesn't need to hear a singer count off the beginning of the song to the rest of the band. Ride the fader at the beginning of the song so after the count, you can bring up the singers volume.

As far as hums and some of the other points mentioned, it's a matter of proper equipment usage and setup. Track down the hums during practice. Set the proper gain structure, and use close-mic'ing techniques. Your goal is a crisp clear sound.

5. Mixes That Lack **Clarity** And **Punch**

"Instruments aren't distinct, and low-end frequencies are either too weak or too big. This is really the number one indication of an amateur mix, especially in the low end. It's either way too heavy or way too light. The way around this is to listen to other records that you think sound great and try to emulate the sound. Sure it takes time, but it will get you in the ballpark."

Bleech, yuck, this is terrible...oh sorry, I just took a drink of unexpectedly cold coffee.

Bobby said it quite well, "listen to other records that you think sound great and try to emulate the sound." Separate out instruments/vocals in your mix by bringing out their natural frequencies. Blend them together so they complement each other but remain distinct in the mix. It's like the classic movie line from Jerry Maguire, "you complete me." Each instrument is its own but when they are brought together, the overall sound benefits.

6. Mixes That Sound **Distant** and Are Devoid Of Any **Feeling** of Intimacy

"The mix sounds distant because too much reverb or overuse of other effects. This is another common trait since a newbie mixer thinks the plug-in effects are so cool (because they are!) that they want to use them all on everything all the way through the song. You'd be surprised just how many effects are used in a great mix sometimes, but the results are so subtle that you can't really tell unless you had the original non-effected sound to compare with. In an amateur mix, you hear them all screaming at you all the time. If you can make it sound great without effects first, you'll automatically moderate their use."

I recall a sound engineer talking about his early days in the biz. He said he mixed with all the fancy effects during a rehearsal and then the lead FOH guy stepped in, turned off 99% of the effects and set a mix with just the EQ. The mix was so much better than what he had done.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, "Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." When it comes to mixing, this is a great quote to keep in mind.

7. Being **late** or too **early** with Mute button

- **Eyes** on the pastor/worship leader
- Give **signals** to your pastor and worship leader to increase confidence
- No **Agendas**, Serve the Lord
- Do not **trust** anyone! Double check everything
 - batteries
 - cords
 - Sound checks
 - recorders
 - CD players
- Do not "**pop**" the fader!
- Always have your sound board label **cleanly** and **clearly**!
- Think about where the service will go next and be **ready**!
 - Intercom are great!
 - Study your leadership
 - Take ownership of mistakes and coach your leadership on better ways.