

Log #5 - Summing Mixer Comparisons

In Log 3 I covered setting up and using the Neve 8816 Summing Mixer. In this log, I will look at the Pros, Cons and other differences it has with the Toft mixer and Pro Tools. To compare, I will again be using the stems for 'Alive' recorded in Year 2 running from Pro Tools.

SUMMING MIXER V TOFT

Comparing the sound of the mix from the Summing Mixer to the mix from the Toft was quite simple. I took the 8 stems from the sound card and patched them into the first 8 channels on the desk. I then mixed as I normally would live.

Physically, I find mixing on the faders more comfortable and natural. The ability to make more precise changes is a big benefit. The Toft offers per-channel EQ which is a great way to subtly edit an instrument's position in the mix. You can easily boost or trim bass to add or remove power respectively. You can also change the volume of a vocal's mid range to enhance it.

On the down side, the sound quality from the Toft is absolutely terrible. It has a very high noise floor, not good for quiet sections in the music or for fade ins/outs. The pots are very dirty meaning each change of a deal results in loud crackling; this makes live changes infeasible. It is also physically falling apart with loose dial caps everywhere making it difficult to use. The 8816 is in very good condition and, in this respect, is a pleasure to use.

SUMMING MIXER V PRO TOOLS¹²

Comparing the sound of the Summing Mixer mix to Pro Tools' mix was interesting. I'd read some articles³ comparing the formulas⁴ that different DAW's use to sum. There are

¹ Cochrane, G. (2012) Analog Summing And Why You Shouldn't Care. Available at: <http://therecordingrevolution.com/2012/05/04/analog-summing-and-why-you-shouldnt-care/> (Accessed: 27 April 2016).

² Houghton, M. (2016) Issue navigator. Available at: <http://www.soundonsound.com/techniques/hardware-software-studio> (Accessed: 27 June 2016).

³ ModernMixing (2013) Modern mixing. Available at: <http://modernmixing.com/blog/2013/02/11/which-daw-sounds-the-best/> (Accessed: 27 June 2016).

⁴ Blackout (no date) DAW summing comparison - A new testing angle - Gearslutz pro audio community. Available at: <https://www.gearslutz.com/board/music-computers/178659-daw-summing-comparison-new-testing-angle.html> (Accessed: 27 June 2016).

mixed opinions on which is the best and how they compared to the hard-wired circuitry of a Summing Mixer or mixing console.

A keyboard and mouse is a far worse interface for mixing than even the dials of the 8816. This can be canceled out by using a control surface, such as the Avid C24 in studio 2. The ability to automate changes over time is great, allowing for a more precise mix over time. I cannot personally tell any difference between Pro Tools' digital mixing algorithm from the summing mixer or Toft, however I do like the mix that I managed to generate in Pro Tools.