1 – Soundstage Exercise

Soundstage

Soundstage is the placement of instruments within the stereo field including left to right panning and front to back depth. The tools of level and panning will be the focus of this exercise. "Level" involves the usage of faders, clip gain, trim pots, or any other gain adjuster to achieve balance or contrast in a mix. One goal of using level adjustments is to create a musical balance of all the provided tracks and to guide listeners' attention in an interesting, compelling, and intentional manner, which may include muting recorded tracks that are distracting or superfluous. "Panning" allows mixers to place instruments at any point within the left to right panoramic soundstage of two-channel systems. Panning allows the engineer to create a soundstage with a sense of lateral width. This helps separate mixing elements spatially and creates depth and dimension, which can be more engaging and interesting for listeners as long as decorrelated left and right channels are mono-compatible and panned elements don't become distracting.

Overview

Use the provided multitrack recording to practice your skills using level and panning to create a compelling soundstage in your mix. This piece, Alejo Granado's "Rumba Chonta," is an excerpt of an Afrocolumbian folk song taken from the Cambridge Multitrack Library. The arrangement is busy and has a lot of percussive elements. It is your job as the mixing engineer to create a compelling sense of space for the presentation of the many instruments in this song.

Guidelines

1. Before starting to mix, come up with a plan for your approach to this exercise by using what you have learned about soundstage from your readings and class instruction. Listen to all the tracks provided and take notes of: 1) any problems you hear, 2) your best guess as to how to fix these problems, and 3) what you would like your final mix to sound like. *Be prepared to discuss your mix approach in class after handing in your assignment.*
2. Focus on soundstage. The primary purpose of this exercise is to improve your skill with soundstage.
3. Use only stock plugins within your DAW. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, it does not take expensive or unique plugins to achieve a good mix. Simple tools used by a skilled mix engineer will outperform fancy plugins used by an unskilled novice. Secondly, this enables a fair comparison between student mixes.
4. Use only level (e.g. trim, clip gain and faders), panning, and/or mutes for this exercise. In later exercises, you will be able to explore using other processing techniques like EQ, compression, reverb, etc.

Initial Deliverables

Please deliver the following in one parent folder entitled "**LastName_Soundstage v1**." Upload this folder and share it with your instructor.
1. Pro Tools session of your mix. Label the session name with your last name and "v1".

2. Make sure the "Audio Files" folder in the Pro Tools session includes <u>only</u> newly created audio files. The original files included in the exercise should be deleted for delivery to the instructor. <u>Please note</u> that you will want to keep a copy of the session with the original audio files for your own records and for future revisions.
3. 48kHz sample rate and 24 bit interleaved stereo .WAV file bounce of your final mix.

First Mix Attempt - Rubric

Criteria	Overall quality of mix	All materials submitted as requested	Followed exercise guidelines	Focused on the assigned mixing technique
Points Allotted	2 points	1 point	1 point	1 point
Guidelines for full points	The mix has a musically compelling soundstage that utilizes the complete stereo field. The usage of panning and level enhances the spaciousness of the song in terms of left to right width and front to back depth.	All materials are properly labelled, all original audio files are deleted in Pro Tools session, and final mix delivered at proper specifications.	Used only stock plugins. Product delivered is well-organized and professional in presentation.	It is clear that a significant amount of effort was put into the soundstage of the mix.

Revision Process

To simulate a real-world mixing process better, and to help you to continue improving your skills with soundstage, this mixing exercise will go through one round of revisions between the instructor and student. In the professional realm, it is very common for clients to listen to the initial mix and provide the mixing engineer with notes for revisions.

After you have submitted your initial mix to the instructor, they will provide you with notes regarding their thoughts on your mix, including what you did well and areas for improvement. Come up with a plan to address the instructor's concerns before starting your revisions. This could be a simple checklist of the revisions you need to complete or a general brainstorm of what techniques you might use during your revisions. Coming up with a plan will help you stay focused and address the instructor's concerns.

Once you are finished revising the exercise, closely listen to the results of your work and write a brief paragraph about your experience. In your written reflection, outline any difficulties you encountered while mixing. Compare your initial impressions and goals for your mix with the actual process of mixing and the final result. Did you fully or partially achieve your goal for

what you wanted your final mix to sound like? Were you able to address all of the instructor's revision notes? Were there any particular revision notes that you struggled with and why?

As the mix engineer, it is your job to provide the instructor (the client in this scenario) with one updated version of this mixing exercise with the below deliverables.

Revision Deliverables

Please deliver the following in <u>one</u> parent folder entitled "**LastName_Soundstage v2**." Upload this folder and share it with your instructor.
1. Pro Tools session of your revised mix addressing the instructor's concerns. Label the session name with your last name and "v2".
2. Make sure the "Audio Files" folder in the Pro Tools session includes <u>only</u> newly created audio files. Please note that you may want to keep a copy of the session with the original audio files for your own records.
3. One Word Doc or PDF of your written reflection notes for your revised exercise. This document should include a brief paragraph and be no longer than one page maximum (shorter is fine).
4. 48kHz sample rate and 24 bit interleaved stereo .WAV file bounce of your revised mix.

Second Mix Attempt - Rubric

Criteria	Addressed revisions	All materials submitted as requested	Followed exercise guidelines	Focused on the assigned mixing technique
Points Allotted	2 points	1 point	1 point	1 point
Guidelines for full points	Your mix addressed all or almost all of the instructor's concerns regarding revisions.	All materials are properly labelled, all original audio files are deleted in Pro Tools session, and final mix delivered at proper specifications.	Word Doc or PDF included with written reflection. Used only stock plugins. Product delivered is well-organized and professional in presentation.	It is clear that a significant amount of effort was put into the soundstage of this exercise.