Metal, Technology and Practice

Personal Take I – Russ Russell

The Quest for Perfection

'All that matters is what comes out of the black boxes' – a saying that I've heard over and over since I first started working in studios, simply meaning whatever methods you employ, whatever technology you use, the final result is all that matters. Throughout history, every breakthrough in music technology has been met with the same reactions. Some hate it and view it as 'cheating', while others embrace it and utilise it to greater or lesser extent. Even things like the first microphones and early recording media like wax cylinders were seen as the devil's work and purists refused to accept them, claiming they stole the soul of the musicians.

Fast forward to today, and while technology has changed enormously, attitudes are still very similar. The big arguing points of today, particularly in the world of extreme heavy music, seem to be triggered drums and quantisation, both of which have been around for decades but have come under increasing scrutiny as they are used more and more in modern production. Everyone is different and has different tastes, which is the pure joy of music production, except that for me, for my own personal tastes, things have gotten to a point where everybody isn't different or unique anymore. There are, of course, many exceptions to this, with hundreds of fantastic producers, engineers and mixers making great records. But as an overall view of my field of music, there are ever-increasing armies of clones, thousands of them, all using the same methods, the same technology, copied rather than actually learned from the same 'rule books', and this is sadly having the effect of making many artists sound the same.

Technology is not being used to enhance the musicians' performance anymore but rather to replace it. It's totally fine to do that, of course, if that's your intention, but the thing I feel is missing most from a lot of bands now is the band, the humans, the subtle interactions between people all the way through the process of writing, rehearsing and recording a song. As I said, this is absolutely fine if that is the original intention of the artist and producer/engineer/mixer (often all the same person these days, but that's a whole other conversation). But from my own personal experience, when you keep a bit of that interaction, that push and pull, the interplay of great musicians, the band are often shocked but utterly thrilled to capture some of the energy, some of that magic that they feel when performing live and not have it all squeezed out of them in the quest for 'perfection'. So, from my perspective, I'd say use your technology

in whatever way you want, whatever is right for the project, learn when to use it and when not to; just try to remember, musicians are humans too.

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