



Hear The Sound

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How I Got THAT SOUND

Michael Brauer: Elle King 'Ex's & Oh's'

JOE MATERA

American mix master Michael Brauer began his career at Mediasound Studios in New York City in 1976. From there, he went on to mix chart-topping albums for artists ranging from Coldplay, Aretha Franklin, Tony Bennett and KT Tunstall to Bob Dylan, Angélique Kidjo, John Mayer and the Rolling Stones to name but a few. He has developed his own sonic approach, which he calls 'Brauerising'. Since 2018, he has operated from his own, New York City-based BrauerSound Studios. Asked to pick a favourite sound to dissect, Brauer chooses the vocal sound on Elle King's 'Ex's & Oh's'.

Gnarly & Snarly

"The direction I really wanted to get was for the vocal to sound and feel kind of

gnarly. I wanted the listener to imagine her snarling when she sang that song. Obviously, I used compression, because I've been doing that for quite a long time, but rarely to the extent where everything is pumping and pushing through the speakers. That was not something that seemed appropriate with the kind of records I was mixing.

"Originally the song was a demo that everybody loved so much, they decided to keep it as the master. It was a bit of challenge because it was recorded in demo fashion. I mixed this song at Electric Lady Studios on an SSL 9000 J. So, with Elle's vocal, in Pro Tools I used a BF-76 [*compressor plug-in*], a Pultec EQ3 and a FabFilter de-esser. On the desk, I put that track and inserted a Presto 41-A tube compressor. The Presto was a radio compressor that was used in the 1950s. It has a nice warm, rich sound to it.

"I then copied the vocal out to a second channel and inserted an EAR 660 [*Fairchild-inspired valve limiter*] across it. That channel was sent out to a UAD ATR plug-in half-inch tape machine with a short left/right delay, and then it went through a [*Waves*] Manny Marroquin Distortion plug-in. So, if the main vocal was on, say, channel 23, the effected vocal returned on channel 24.

"That was my blend and what I would do was either add 24 to the main vocal channel or switch to it entirely depending on the performance of the vocal. Sometimes it could be just a line, or it might just be a word or even a verse. Elle's vocal tended to get brassy-sounding when she belted it out, so switching to the EAR warmed up those high notes. The EAR kept that higher register of hers nice and fat, but also somewhat distorted. I was doing a fair amount of attenuation or dropping back the distortion any time that it got too nasty."

Make It Jump

"I think on that song I was influenced by Tchad Blake and his whole approach to distortion and compression, where a lot of stuff he'd done had a fair amount of grittiness and nastiness like a snarl, which was what I wanted to achieve with the vocal sound.

"Over-compression on tracks can make things sound small — but, properly ridden, it can be the opposite. It absolutely jumped out of the speakers. I did a lot of riding of the vocal and most of the instruments to get a lot of dynamics into the song. It worked well within the Brauerise method, where I had the song pumping, very vibing and emotional. And in this case, it fit the song perfectly." **///**