

# /pro tips wolfgang gartner

His name is one of the biggest in dance music. We talk to the electro-house master about ‘wtf sounds’, when to abandon a mix and the importance of hard work.

**How do you see the dance music industry developing over the next two to three years?**

I see it developing in a big way! It already is. You look at people like David Guetta doing collaborations with Akon and such, and you see more and more people embracing dance music. It’s really on the rise here in America too, which is exciting because it had a pretty bad lull here in the early 2000s. Some people think mass consumption of dance music is a bad thing. I feel the other way. The more people who get into it, the more people will start producing, and it just leads to more talent, more music and more of what we love.

**When mixing, what do you find the hardest thing to get sounding right?**

The low end: the way the kick and bass sit together – always has been, always will be. The solution for me ends up being a mix of sidechaining and multi-band compression, but I still haven’t found any magic settings or combination of plugins. It’s always hard to get it right, and the process is different every time.

**Which sounds do you struggle to make most?**

Those ‘what the fuck’ sounds. By that I mean sounds that you can’t identify or say: “that’s a saw or a square wave” and you can’t pin down how they were made when you hear them. I use these kinds of sounds as leads or hooks in a track.

Just a melody played with one or two oscillators on a synth isn’t enough for me. I’m not satisfied with using a vanilla preset or saw wave; it’s too simple, too predictable. I like to try and create a sound the synth wasn’t supposed to make. I usually end up using a lot of modulation and automation to tweak different parameters and morph the sound into something unique.

**Any advice on monitoring? Quiet? Loud? Do you prefer flat and boring speakers, headphones or big, chunky monitors?**

I’ve been using the same pair of Tannoy Reveal monitors since 1997, powered by a rare model Nikko amp that was made

in about 1979. It’s a completely coloured monitoring system, and probably very inaccurate, but it sounds great! The old amp can drive the monitors really hard, and I push it as hard as it will go when I’m working.

I’ve battled on and off with getting some high-end powered monitors and ditching this setup but every time I go into somebody’s studio and hear what flat, accurate monitors sound like, I’m turned off. Maybe they’re good for mixing and getting levels right, but the sound seems so sterile. When I’m trying to write a bassline, or jamming on one of my synths, I need a deep bass and a crispy treble with the sound in my face. I do have another set of smaller monitors in the studio on a parallel wall as an A/B system, but they are pretty coloured and inaccurate too. I guess it works for me because my ears know the speakers. I always test out the finished tracks on other systems in the house and in the car and my mixes end up sounding OK.

**What is your biggest self-criticism?**

Not knowing when an approach or attempt at a certain sound is working in the studio, and spending too much time trying to nail something that just isn’t going to work. Sometimes you need to know when to move on, and I have a tendency to be too persistent. This can play both ways, but a lot of the time it’s more of a flaw than an asset.

**How important do you think it is to have your music mastered commercially? Can you do it yourself as effectively and what tools would you recommend?**

It’s extremely important to have a good mastering job, but how you choose to do it is down to personal taste. I decided to start mastering my own stuff recently and invested in some nice hardware to help do the job. My main tools now are a Crane

Song STC-8 compressor and an SPL Tube Vitalizer, in addition to a pair of Empirical Labs Distressors.

**What do you believe is the secret to your success as a producer?**

First and foremost, it’s that making dance music is the only thing I ever wanted to do since I was a kid. I had absolutely no interest in anything else that could materialise into a job. Girls, food, making music – that’s pretty much what I was interested in. If there had been something else that had interested me I probably would have pursued it a long time ago and quit this music thing during one of the hard periods where I wasn’t successful. But there’s just nothing else out there for me besides this.

Another thing is that I’m extremely antisocial and reclusive, so I pretty much don’t go out, don’t socialise and don’t do anything except sit at home and make music. That means I get a lot done. And I seem to have a personality trait that makes me persistent when I want something. Once I’ve decided what it is that I want I am willing to do almost anything to get it.

It’s not easy for me to make good music; it doesn’t just flow out of me like water. It’s something that takes a lot of effort and hard work with every track I make, but I want it so bad that I’m willing to sit in all weekend and try and write a bassline for 15 hours until something finally comes out. Yes, it really does take me that long.

**And finally... Have you any advice for aspiring young producers out there?**

Keep at it. I know everybody says it, but that’s because it’s true. I had been sending demo tapes to record labels for seven years before I got my first record deal.

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