



“My job is not necessarily to put my own stamp on it, but to make sure it is the best-sounding music it can be.”

“I didn’t even know that mastering existed, but once I found it, I felt right at home,” Don Grossinger says fondly. After having already developed a successful 12-year career as a radio DJ and live sound engineer, Don started over from scratch for his new career, working in a studio taking out the garbage! But because he had already built up a solid technical background in his previous jobs, he moved up the engineering ladder quickly. “It seemed that everything I had done by coincidence up to that point led me to pursue a mastering career,” he says. Twenty-five years later, he is a highly sought-after mastering engineer. Don took some time out to explain this obscure yet important role in which he gets to make audio sound like music to your ears.

## who: Don Grossinger Job: Mastering Engineer

### What exactly is mastering?

Mastering is a combination of art and science, because it’s both the last creative step and the first manufacturing step in the process of getting music out into the world. Mastering engineers have a great deal of impact on the final sound that goes out to the public, using sophisticated tools, a good set of ears, and their perspectives on how each individual genre sounds and how music sounds in general.

### What is involved in your work?

To make a final master recording that can be used for duplication. If I listen to a track and the bass isn’t crisp enough or you can’t understand the lyrics, I use EQ (equalization) and compression to bring out or alter different sounds within the music. I have a bunch of sophisticated EQ devices that allow me to adjust the sound of the music within certain frequency ranges on a microscopic level. I use a compressor on the entire mix to achieve the overall loudness for the project without exceeding “digital zero”—the loudest level at which a CD can be recorded. I make sure the intros and fadeouts are correct, and that the spacing between tracks is exact and artistically good so that the project flows from one song to another in a pleasing manner. These technical aspects have to be exact because everything will be manufactured from that master. We try to bring everything into balance so it’s a good listening experience and also so that the music is competitive in the market.

### Do you prefer working with a specific genre?

Each project, regardless of genre, is its own entity, and it’s all enjoyable to me. And I have the experience and skills to move between genres professionally. In fact, I’ve become best known for doing mastering on genres that I never used to listen to, like hip-hop, electronica, and dance music.

### Are there any special projects you’ve worked on?

It was a great honor for me to do the mastering on 10 vinyl albums for my all-time heroes, the Rolling Stones. Another one of my specialties is cutting records, something I love to do. I feel like a blacksmith when I’m cutting vinyl because it’s a very physical thing: You get a blank, micropolished, lacquered disc, and you cut the groove into the disc with a record-cutting lathe. That disc is then used to press vinyl records.

### How do you participate in the artist’s vision so late in the recording process?

I have to assume that when someone sends a recording to me it basically expresses what the artist wants it to. My job is not necessarily to put my own stamp on it, but to make sure it is the best-sounding music it can be. I communicate with the client, so I know what he or she would like the music to sound like. People are pretty respectful when they see that you’re on their side and you aren’t going to butcher their project. Clients put a lot of trust in me because I enjoy this and have proven that I can do a good job.

—Veronica Dominguez-Garcia

Want to check out more music careers? Go to [www.mymusicalive.com/coolcareers](http://www.mymusicalive.com/coolcareers)