THE MIX ACADEMY

MIX MASTERY BLUEPRINT

Christian Schormann

Decision (primary focus) + Portfolio Review

CRITIQUE BY	MIXES REVIEWED	DATE
David Glenn · The Mix Academy	Decision (primary focus) + Portfolio Review	March 2026

OVERALL MIX SCORE

72 / 100

Strong intermediate with advanced creative instincts. Primary growth areas: high-frequency tonal balance, low-end sustain, and translation consistency.

MIX CATEGORY BREAKDOWN

Balance	Low End	Vocal Placement	Dynamics	Depth & Space	Translation
74 /100	68 /100	82 /100	76 /100	80 /100	65 /100

Category scores reflect the overall balance of strengths and growth areas in this critique. Use them as a baseline to track improvement across future mixes.

OVERALL MIX DIAGNOSIS

Christian, this mix shows real creative confidence. The spatial design is thoughtful, the vocal sits with intention, and you're thinking about the emotional arc of the song — not just running down a checklist. That foundation is harder to teach than any EQ move, and you already have it.

Where the mix falls short is in two areas that tend to travel together: high-frequency tonal balance and low-end weight. The upper midrange and presence region sits slightly forward across several elements — not dramatically, but enough to create listening fatigue over time and to pull the mix away from the warmth and body your references carry. The low end, while present, lacks the sustained physical weight that makes a mix feel authoritative across different playback systems.

These are calibration problems, not creative problems. They come from making decisions in one listening environment without fully verifying how those decisions hold up elsewhere. Both are fixable with a focused referencing process and a more disciplined translation workflow.

The gap between where this mix sits and where it needs to be is a precision gap, not a foundation gap.

MIX STRENGTHS

Vocal Production and Emotional Placement

The lead vocal is the clear emotional center of this mix. The compression is musical — it breathes without pumping, and the automation keeps the lyric intelligible across the full dynamic range of the song. You've handled a technically demanding element with genuine instinct, and it shows.

Spatial Design and Effects Choices

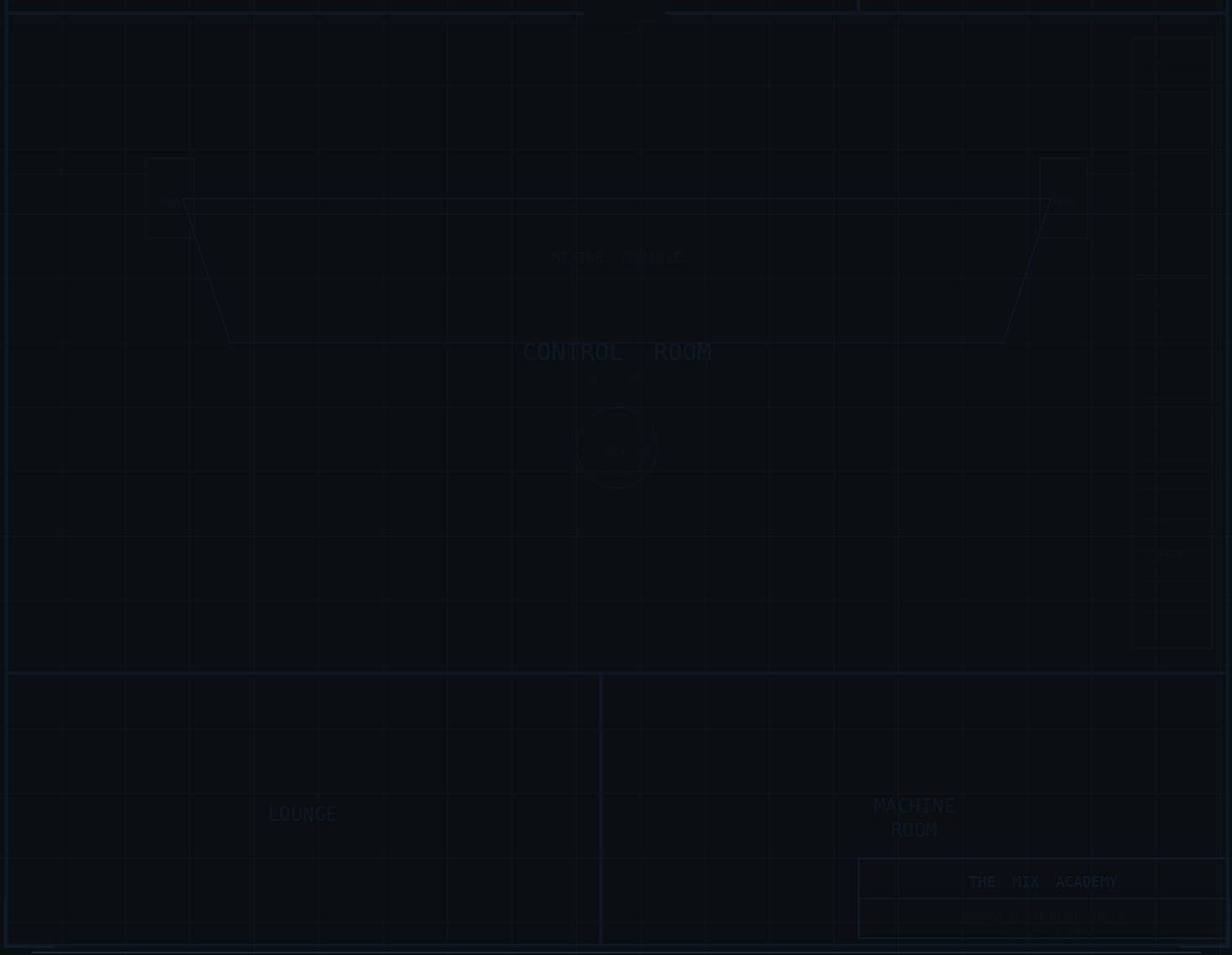
The delay throws are intentional and serve the song rather than decorate it. The reverb creates genuine front-to-back depth without washing out definition. Thinking in three dimensions — not just width — is a skill many engineers at this level are still developing. You already have it.

Dynamic Architecture Across Sections

The verse-to-chorus lift is real and earned. You're building energy through arrangement and automation rather than just pushing the level. That structural thinking is one of the clearest signs of an engineer who understands how records are supposed to feel — not just how they're supposed to measure.

Arrangement-Integrated Mixing Approach

You're treating mixing and production as a continuous process — shaping sounds through instrument choice first, then refining with mix tools. That's how professional records get made. It reflects a philosophy that will compound in value with every mix you complete.



KEY IMPROVEMENT AREAS

ISSUE 01 High-Frequency Tonal Balance: Presence and Edge Conflict

THE PROBLEM

Several elements — hi-hats, choir vocals, and certain percussive textures — carry more energy than necessary in specific high-frequency bands. The conflict is most audible in the 2–4kHz range, where vocal presence and cymbal edge compete for the same perceptual space. There is also accumulation in the 4–6kHz range, where snare articulation and vocal consonants blur together, and in the 6–8kHz range where cymbal aggression compounds the overall brightness. The cumulative effect is a mix that reads as slightly fatiguing on accurate playback and sits forward of the tonal balance carried by professional references in this genre.

ROOT CAUSE

This pattern develops in two common ways. The first: a playback chain with slight high-frequency emphasis causes you to stop pulling back brightness you can no longer clearly hear — not a flaw in judgment, just a calibration gap between your monitoring environment and the outside world.

The second, and equally common: high-frequency buildup accumulates gradually during long sessions as hearing sensitivity shifts. After two or three hours, your ears lose some sensitivity in the upper midrange. The natural response is to add presence or air to compensate — which sounds right in the moment but reads as fatiguing on a fresh listen the next day. This is why a translation check at the end of a long session will catch things your ears stopped hearing two hours in.

When this tonal pattern appears consistently across multiple tracks over time, it points to a systematic process gap. The corrective process is the same either way: band-specific A/B referencing at the halfway point of every session — before your ears have had the chance to normalize to the mix.

WHAT SKILL THIS REFLECTS

High-frequency balance is one of the last things to fully calibrate in a mixer's ear. It requires disciplined referencing and the willingness to make subtractive moves in ranges that subjectively feel like they're adding clarity. Building this skill is less about knowing what to cut and more about developing a reliable reference point that tells you when you've gone too far — and learning to check it before fatigue makes the decision for you.

ISSUE 01 High-Frequency Tonal Balance: Presence and Edge Conflict — continued

HOW TO FIX IT — GOING FORWARD

- **Apply Frequency Focused Referencing™ to the 2–8kHz region specifically.** Loop your chorus against a professional reference in the same genre. Solo that frequency band on both tracks and A/B them directly. Your goal isn't to match the reference exactly — it's to hear where you're diverging and make a conscious, informed decision about it.
- **Think in specific sub-bands, not broad ranges.** A hi-hat problem is most likely a 6–8kHz aggression issue. A choir presence conflict typically lives at 2–4kHz. A vocal edge blur usually sits at 4–6kHz. The more precisely you identify the range, the more surgical your corrective EQ — and the less collateral damage you create in adjacent frequencies.
- **Do a fresh-ears check before any final high-frequency decisions.** Step away from the session for at least 20 minutes, then come back and listen specifically to the presence and air region. If it reads differently than it did at hour three, trust the fresh listen. Ear fatigue is real and consistent — build the reset into your workflow.
- **For monitoring calibration:** If you suspect a translation bias in your playback chain, the Sennheiser HD650 or HD6XX with the free Oratory1990 correction preset offers unusually reliable tonal balance for mixing decisions. Use it as a reference tool, not a primary monitor replacement.

BIGGEST RISK IF UNFIXED

If the high-frequency forward balance remains uncorrected, mixes will feel energetic and detailed in the studio but become fatiguing on consumer playback within a few minutes. Listeners won't identify the cause — they'll simply stop listening.

ISSUE 02 Low-End Weight, Bass Sustain, and Translation

THE PROBLEM

The bass carries less sustained energy than the reference recordings you're targeting, particularly in the 60–120Hz fundamental range where physical low-end weight lives. The kick-bass relationship is functional — the two elements don't conflict — but they don't lock into a unified low-frequency foundation. On playback systems smaller than full-range monitors, the low end thins out significantly. Compared directly to how long the bass holds through each phrase in your stated references, there is a clear deficit in sustained energy that affects the overall authority and physicality of the mix.

ROOT CAUSE

Conservative low-end treatment usually develops as a corrective response to earlier problems. Mixes get muddy, so you pull back. Mixes sound boomy on certain systems, so you reduce. Over time, this creates a habit of treating the low end defensively rather than constructively. The result is a mix that's clean but thin — one that sits well in the monitoring environment but loses authority anywhere with real low-frequency extension.

There is also a critical harmonic dimension here. Bass translation on small speakers comes almost entirely from harmonic content above roughly 120–200Hz — not from sub-bass level. Sub-bass frequencies below 80Hz are largely absent on phone speakers, earbuds, and most Bluetooth devices. What makes a bass line audible and felt on those systems is the presence and character of its harmonics in the 120–300Hz range. If that harmonic content is thin, the bass disappears the moment sub-bass can no longer be reproduced — which is on nearly every consumer device your listeners own.

WHAT SKILL THIS REFLECTS

Low-end management is one of the core differentiators between intermediate and advanced mixers. Building a kick-bass foundation that feels full on large systems and still translates to earbuds requires understanding the harmonic relationship between kick and bass — not just their individual levels. It also requires the confidence to commit to low-end weight, which takes time to develop when early experience has trained you to treat low end as a problem to manage rather than a foundation to build.

ISSUE 02 Low-End Weight, Bass Sustain, and Translation — continued

HOW TO FIX IT — GOING FORWARD

- **Use Frequency Focused Referencing™ on the 30–150Hz range.** Solo this band on both your mix and a reference, loop the chorus, and A/B directly. Listen for sustain as much as level — professional low-end holds through the phrase. If your bass attacks and disappears while the reference sustains, the issue is harmonic content and decay, not peak level.
- **Build bass tones with harmonic content above the sub-bass.** Controlled saturation and parallel compression add perceived weight and sustain without simply boosting low frequencies. Aim for a bass that feels physical on full-range systems and still carries its melodic line on small devices through the harmonic information in the 120–300Hz range.
- **Address the kick-bass relationship as a unit.** Study how kick and bass share the 60–120Hz range in two or three of your reference recordings. How does the kick carve space within the bass? How does the bass sustain around the kick's attack? A clear mental model of this relationship — built from careful reference listening — will guide your decisions more reliably than any individual technique.
- **For sub-bass awareness on headphones:** If you're mixing primarily on headphones and find low-end decisions hard to evaluate accurately, a tactile system such as the SubPac M2X can significantly improve your perception of sub-bass and kick energy. Frame it as a translation check tool, not a primary monitoring source.

BIGGEST RISK IF UNFIXED

A mix with consistently thin low-end reads as polite and lightweight everywhere that matters — car systems, club environments, full-range consumer speakers. It will hold up on laptop speakers and earbuds but will never feel competitive next to professional material on a system with real extension. Low-end is where authority lives.

ISSUE 03 Choir Vocal Movement and Mix Stability

THE PROBLEM

The choir vocals are automated to pan across the stereo field during the chorus. In isolation, this is a technically competent move. In context, it pulls the listener's attention away from the lyric and creates a sense of instability during a section that should feel resolved and massive. A chorus is a statement — it needs to feel arrived at. Automation movement during that statement works against the emotional intention of the song, regardless of how well-executed the effect is technically.

ROOT CAUSE

This is a case of applying a technique that works in some contexts to one where it works against the song. Auto-panning creates movement and energy, which sounds impressive in isolation and in transitional moments. But the chorus already has energy from arrangement, dynamics, and harmonic density. Adding stereo movement on top doesn't amplify that energy — it diffuses the listener's focus. The ear is drawn to moving elements in the stereo field, which means the listener begins tracking the pan movement rather than absorbing the lyric. You captured this yourself in your listening notes: 'I'm trying to follow their left to right movement and it's distracting from listening to the lyric.' That self-observation is accurate and worth trusting.

WHAT SKILL THIS REFLECTS

Knowing when not to use a technique is one of the most important skills a mixer develops. It requires separating 'this sounds impressive' from 'this serves the song.' The strongest mixing decisions are the ones that make the song feel inevitable. When a listener becomes aware of a technique, the technique has usually overstepped.

ISSUE 03 Choir Vocal Movement and Mix Stability — continued

HOW TO FIX IT — GOING FORWARD

- **Establish the chorus choir as a wide, static image.** Pan the ensemble to create a sense of size through placement rather than movement. The goal is a choir that sounds like it fills the room, not one that moves through it.
- **Build thickness through arrangement and harmonic density, not automation.** If the static image feels thin, address it through layering, harmonic doubling, or controlled stereo width on the choir bus. Movement is not a solution to thinness — it's a distraction from it.
- **Reserve automation movement for transitional moments.** Auto-panning is useful in pre-chorus builds, breakdown transitions, or as a deliberate one-time ear candy moment. In the main statement of a chorus, it's too active.
- **Use a lyric focus test.** Play the chorus three times in a row and notice what you're tracking. If you're following the pan movement rather than the lyric, the automation is pulling focus. The mix should draw the listener into the song, not into the mix.

BIGGEST RISK IF UNFIXED

Wide, moving stereo elements are the first to become unstable on phone speakers and mono playback. Phones effectively narrow the stereo image through partial mono summing — wide or moving elements can collapse, thin out, or cause comb filtering artifacts that make the choir sound smaller and less stable than a controlled static placement would. The movement that reads as interesting on monitors becomes a translation liability on the systems most listeners actually use.

TRANSLATION RISK

Where this mix will likely diverge from professional results on real-world playback systems — and why.

Car Speakers

The forward high-frequency balance — particularly in the 3–5kHz range — will translate as noticeable brightness or edge in car environments, where audio systems often already carry natural 2–4kHz emphasis from speaker placement and cabin acoustics. The low-end deficit will also be apparent; car systems generally have enough low-frequency extension to expose the lack of sustained bass weight, making the mix feel lightweight in an environment where listeners expect physical presence.

Earbuds and Consumer Headphones

This is where the high-frequency issues will be most apparent. Consumer earbuds commonly add 2–5kHz emphasis as part of their frequency response character, which compounds the existing presence-region forward balance and pushes the mix toward fatiguing territory. Listening fatigue will set in earlier than it should. The bass will also thin out on earbuds without sub-bass extension — and because the harmonic content in the 120–300Hz range is not fully developed in this mix, there is less upper bass information available to carry the low-end through on these systems.

Phone Speakers

Phone speakers roll off aggressively below approximately 200Hz and operate in partial mono — the narrow speaker spacing collapses or narrows the stereo image significantly. Wide stereo elements, including the choir, may feel smaller, thinner, or less stable than they do on monitors. Very wide or moving elements are particularly vulnerable: partial mono summing can cause them to lose presence or introduce subtle comb filtering artifacts. The 3–6kHz presence accumulation becomes the dominant tonal character, and the low end will feel absent rather than implied — because the harmonic layer that would otherwise carry the bass through small speakers is underdeveloped in this mix.

Club and PA Systems

Large systems with extended sub-bass response will reveal the low-end deficit most clearly. A mix with conservative fundamental range treatment will sound polite and lightweight compared to professional material on the same system. High-frequency edge may actually recede somewhat on large systems due to room diffusion and acoustic absorption — making this the one environment where the tonal balance issue is least problematic. But the low-end deficit will be more apparent, not less, and that's where professional material creates its physical impact.

FASTEST PATH TO IMPROVEMENT

The three actions that will most accelerate your development. Skill-focused, practical, and repeatable.

01 Implement a Translation Checking Workflow Before Every Mix Is Called Finished

Before you declare any mix complete, run a systematic translation check. Play the full chorus on at least three different playback systems: your primary monitoring environment, a consumer earbud or headphone, and either a phone speaker or a Bluetooth speaker. Listen specifically for two things: tonal balance shifts in the 2–6kHz range, and low-end behavior below 150Hz. Document what you hear on each system. If the mix changes significantly between environments, that information should send you back to the session to address the gaps. This is a required step, not an optional one.

02 Apply Frequency Focused Referencing™ at the Halfway Point of Every Mix

Don't wait until a mix is finished to reference. At the halfway point — when the foundational balance is established but before you've committed to fine detail work — A/B your mix against two professional reference recordings in the same genre. Focus on two specific regions: the 2–6kHz presence range and the 60–150Hz low-end weight range. Solo each band in isolation and listen for where you're diverging from the reference. Make corrective decisions before continuing. Catching calibration drift at the halfway point costs five minutes. Catching it at the end costs an hour.

03 Study Kick-Bass Relationships and Low-End Harmonics in Professional Mixes

Pull five reference tracks in your primary genre and spend dedicated time — separate from any active mix session — analyzing how the kick and bass interact. Focus on how they share the 60–120Hz range, how the bass sustains through the kick's attack, and how the relationship holds up on small speakers. Pay particular attention to the harmonic content in the 120–300Hz range — this is what makes bass audible on systems that can't reproduce sub-bass. When you can hear clearly what professional low-end is doing in that harmonic range, you'll have a real target to build toward. This is ear training, not session work. Treat it that way.

PORTFOLIO PATTERN ANALYSIS

Across *Decision* and your recent published work (Lonely, Climbing Downwards, Angel's Promise, Black), three consistent patterns emerge:

Consistent High-Frequency Forward Balance

Every mix in this portfolio shows accumulated energy in the 2–6kHz range relative to professional reference material in the same genre. This isn't a one-off creative decision — the consistency across multiple mixes over time suggests a systematic calibration pattern. Whether the cause is a monitoring translation bias, a referencing gap, or both, the corrective process is the same: regular, frequency-specific A/B referencing at the halfway point of every session.

Conservative Low-End Treatment

Across all five tracks reviewed, the low end reads as controlled but thin — particularly in the 60–150Hz fundamental range where physical bass weight lives. The pattern is internally consistent, which suggests a systematic mix habit rather than a series of individual decisions. The corrective path is deliberate practice with low-end referencing and the willingness to commit to more sustained bass weight.

Genuine Creative Instincts and Spatial Intelligence

The use of delays, spatial effects, and dynamic architecture across the portfolio is consistently thoughtful. You're not mixing reactively — you're designing experiences. That creative-first approach is the foundation that technical precision gets built on, and it's the harder of the two things to develop. The technical gaps described in this report are learnable. The creative instincts you already have are what make the investment worthwhile.

The through-line: Creative-first mixer, closing the gap toward technical consistency. The instincts are already there. The remaining work is process.

3-WEEK IMPROVEMENT PLAN

WEEK 1 Calibrate Your Reference Process

- Select two professional reference tracks in the same genre as *Decision* and load them into your session template.
- Apply Frequency Focused Referencing™ to the 2–6kHz range. Solo this band on both your mix and the reference and A/B them. Document what you hear.
- Apply the same process to the 30–150Hz range. Listen for sustain, not just level. Document the gap.
- Remix the chorus of *Decision* using this referencing process. Focus only on tonal balance — don't change anything else.
- *Daily ear training: 10 minutes comparing high-frequency balance in two reference mixes. No DAW — just focused listening. Note where presence sits relative to the low-mids.*

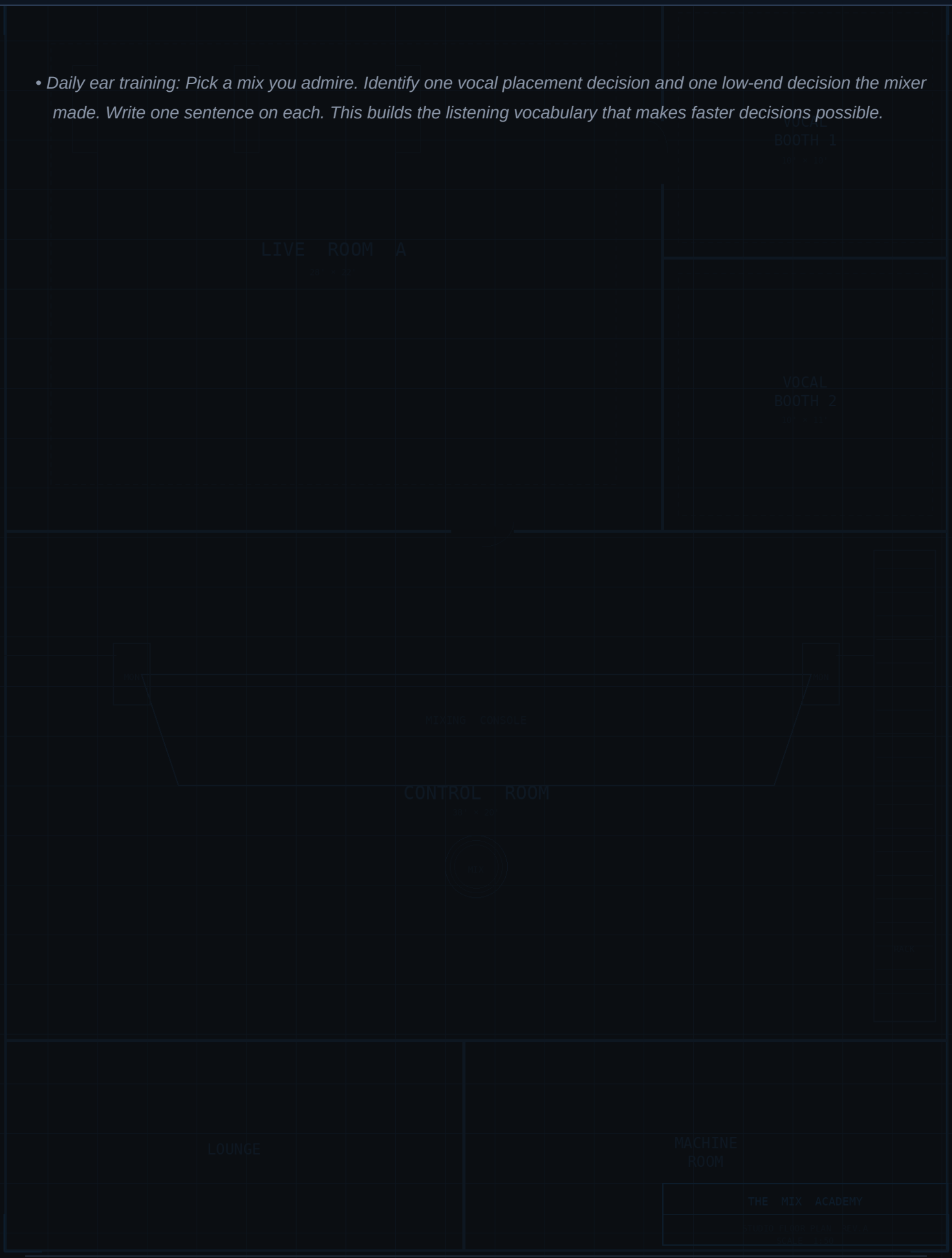
WEEK 2 Build Low-End Confidence

- Study the kick-bass relationship in three professional mixes in your genre. Solo the 60–150Hz range and analyze how kick and bass share that space.
- Practice building bass tones with harmonic content above the sub-bass — saturation or parallel compression to add sustain and weight.
- Remix the full low-end of *Decision* — bass and kick only — using reference tracks as your target. Check translation on small speakers every 15 minutes.
- A/B the result against the original. Document what changed and why.
- *Daily ear training: 10 minutes listening to bass lines in reference mixes through earbuds only. Focus on what survives — that's the harmonic layer you're building toward.*

WEEK 3 Build the Translation Checking Habit

- Complete a full remix of *Decision* using both the referencing and low-end processes from Weeks 1 and 2.
- Run the translation check protocol before calling the mix finished: primary monitors, consumer earbuds, phone speaker or Bluetooth. Document what you hear on each.
- Address any tonal balance or low-end issues surfaced in the translation check before finalizing.
- Remix one published track (Lonely or Climbing Downwards) using the full process from the start.

• *Daily ear training: Pick a mix you admire. Identify one vocal placement decision and one low-end decision the mixer made. Write one sentence on each. This builds the listening vocabulary that makes faster decisions possible.*



LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT TRACK

Over the next 6–12 months, these three areas represent your highest-leverage investment:

01 Translation Literacy and Referencing Discipline

The single highest-leverage skill you can develop right now is a consistent, frequency-specific referencing process — not occasionally at the end of a mix, but at the halfway point, in specific bands, against professional material in your genre. This is how you build the internal calibration that makes mixing decisions fast and trustworthy. A/B referencing is not a crutch. It is the professional standard.

02 Low-End Architecture

Study how professional engineers build low-end that translates everywhere. Learn the interplay between sub information (felt on large systems), fundamental bass (heard on full-range systems), and upper harmonic content (what carries the bass to small speakers). Practice Frequency Focused Referencing™ on the 30–150Hz range on every mix you complete over the next six months.

03 Editorial Judgment — Knowing When Not To

You have strong creative instincts. The next layer of development is knowing when to hold them back. Study your favorite records and note where they choose stability over movement, simplicity over complexity. The best creative decisions in a mix are often invisible to the listener. Build a practice of asking: 'Does this serve the song, or does it serve the mix?' They're not always the same answer.

THE MIX ACADEMY

David Glenn

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Christian,

The creative thinking in this mix is genuinely ahead of where most engineers are at this stage. These aren't problems of musicality or taste — those are already working in your favor. They're about calibration and process: building a more reliable feedback loop between what you hear in the room and what the mix actually sounds like in the world.

Build the translation checking habit. Use Frequency Focused Referencing™ at the halfway point on every mix. These processes compound with every session you complete.

The gap between where you are and your next level is a calibration gap, not a talent gap. That's a good problem to have.

David Glenn