

IRAA JURY REFLECTIONS ON SOUND MIXING, RECORDING, AND MUSIC PRODUCTION

Indian Recording Arts Academy (IRAA) Awards recognises exceptional talent in music, soundtrack recording, and mixing in Indian music. The annual event organised by *PALM Magazine* brings forth IRAA Jury's fresh perspective on the bigger questions posed in the music industry like AI for music production, the status of mega consoles, emerging trends in sound recording and mixing, and more. IRAA Jury shares their experiences and viewpoints on sound recording and mixing in this feature.



KJ Singh

Are you using AI for music production?

Some 30 years ago I was using a software called Band-In-Box to create genre specific musical parts, which was rudimentary form of AI. Then came some advancement with engineers using plugins to learn a noise and clean it or reference our mixes to a prescribed genre format, created from machine learning. The full-blown impact of AI will become apparent in the coming year or so.

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, then why? If no, then why?

During the era of big consoles, studios were considered dark magic places and working on such an intimidating console was nothing less than witchcraft! Of course, the prestige of an engineer, who could easily glide over such a huge, knob-filled console, and create wonderful sound combinations, was immense. And I think it still remains. Though they are looked upon as dinosaurs of the industry as the young generation has no clue what those large format consoles did or what it meant to learn and creatively use it.



Anindo Bose

What makes a great Music Producer?

Someone that can complement the vision of the composer with all honesty and not be afraid to push the musical boundaries as and when needed.

Are you using AI for music production?

We are all using it in some form or the other. If you look at most restorative plugins one can see how wonderfully it can salvage at least part or sometimes majority of recorded parts. But this should not encourage bad recording practices in the first place just because there are tools to better it in post. Basics will always be the first and foremost thing to work on.



Avinash Oak

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, then why? If no, then why?

Yes, Mega consoles were a mark of a status for studios and sound engineers. They were an essential and obvious entity in a pro studio. But no more.

The ways of music production have changed to make the big format consoles entirely dispensable. Moreover, they are expensive.

What is the emerging trend/technology in song recording and mixing?

CBMP - Cloud Based Music Production is the emergent trend worldwide. And apps with Artificial Intelligence is the name of the game - something like 'Naadsadhana' for Indian Classical Music.



DJ Phukan

What is the emerging trend/technology in the music production industry?

As the cultural environment is changing due to new technologies coming in and connectivity has become much faster throughout the world (mainly because of internet), the taste of people as well as the means (and the tools) of creating music is changing rapidly. I think we are on the verge of a paradigm shift where music production is concerned. Also, I think we are approaching a global music where, all cultures around the globe are going to merge into a single one. The music in coming days may involve more intelligence, more complexity, less organic, extensive use of AI, and become shorter in length.

What makes a great music producer?

Knowledge and sense of music, creativity, vision, good taste, and ability to translate it to technical parameters to successfully present the whole idea into a sonic domain can play vital role in making oneself a great music producer.



Goutam Basu

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, then why? If no, then why?

No, because I feel that Mega console, which is not the power of an engineer, is good for live programs, live recording, and for your profile picture. In my sonic experience, I would say, without you feeling the sonic soul and breathe, it's not going to come out as a subject. It doesn't matter if you mix it 'in the box' or in 'mega console'. Feel the audio project's fragrance and it will come out as good sonic value for the audience.

What is the emerging trends/technologies in song recording and mixing?

Day by day, the technology is updating and becoming pure. But sometimes too much purity cannot be digested. Good sources, good listening rooms, and patience are required along with updated technology.



Nikkhil Beri

Are you using AI for music production?

I have not yet started using AI for music production. I am still relying on old school methods of music production where I like to call my musician friends and discuss musical ideas and come up with a song. But I would love to explore AI in times to come as it's an emerging trend and in some areas of music production it can get some jobs done quickly.

What are the emerging trends/technologies in the music production industry?

- The most promising and a significant emerging trend is using machine learning & AI tools for music production.
- Spatial audio is also emerging strongly. Due to fast growing development in AR & VR, the importance of Spatial Audio and immersive audio experience is also fast growing.
- Cloud Based Collaborations (Specially post Covid)
- BlockChain & NFTs for transparent Royalty Tracking

What makes a great Music Producer?

I can go on and on with this one. But I will just mention a few key points:

- Well educated in Music and Literature
- Good understanding of various genres of music
- Good sense of music technology
- Must be an artist at heart
- A keen observer of constantly changing musical trends
- Knowledge of how to make a hit song. After all, it's also about getting the song to the masses.
- Having good knowledge of music business
- Great understanding of lyrics. Only then he/she would be able to do justice to the song at the production stage.



PA Deepak

Are you using AI for your work?

In my career, I have always benefited from embracing technology in audio mixing. For years I've leveraged machine learning to process vocal recordings, movie dialogues, and distorted audio, taking the sound from the noise of the room and leveraging that signal as a filter to get to a clean recording. Audio software has ultimately led to better listening experiences for the user, and I see AI as a path to accelerating that, so folks like me can spend less time editing and more time being creative.

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, then why? If no, then why?

Previously the big consoles were a must have as they had to record all the musicians in one go. Having a big console eases the workflow and instead of searching for 270th track in a DAW, one could use a physical channel on a console easily. Nowadays, most of the big consoles are Hybrid (Analog+Digital) and are being used in the Orchestral Recording Studios, Film Mix Rooms, and Live Sound (PA).

What are the emerging trends/technologies in song recording and mixing?

Whatever technologies emerge, the person who is operating the console is more important. Then the DAWs, Software Plugins, and Hardware Effects processing are considered to be the only tools. It's like having a \$10k Camera that won't take pictures by itself.

The art of recording, mixing, and mastering is always the same.



Sai Shravanam

Are you using AI for music production?

AI is in a way part of many of our recordings where we tune vocals using Auto-Tune or even pick resonances in recordings by automated plugins like Soothe.

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, then why? If no, then why?

Mega consoles do bring a sense of not merely prestige but sensitivity to the productions. Working on consoles help our ears focus on the sound and the intention rather than the feedback our eyes are given using the DAW. Nevertheless, the world has moved in the box owing to the ease and recall that is required for all the current productions. There are times where we edit and make changes until a few hours prior to release. Both have their pros and cons.

What is the emerging trend/technology in song recording and mixing?

Emerging trend is how every artiste feels empowered by the ease of technology at their home. It's promising to see youngsters create content without dependency for their basic needs. But trend doesn't mean professionalism. For professional sound, there is no trend, it's about the truth in our understanding of sound & its intention.



Vijay Kurien

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige?

According to my perspective, it's 90% human and 10% machine. Let's look at two scenarios assuming that the final output is on an audio Compact Disk (CD), audio cassette, and uncompressed raw digital audio data.

Mega consoles, which are large, high-end mixing consoles with an array of high-quality preamps, frequency controls, dynamic controls, and other processing tools with a legion of channels, offer recording engineers advanced capabilities for shaping or manipulating audio. Clients and musicians may perceive these consoles as symbols of professionalism and a commitment to quality, further enhancing the engineer's reputation. However, it's essential to note that the recording industry has evolved significantly in recent years.

Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) and software plugins have become increasingly powerful and accessible, making it possible to achieve high-quality recordings without relying on mega

consoles. Many independent and home-based recording engineers now produce professional-level work using digital tools.

In the case of lossy compressed format like the MP3 or AAC files, the audio is compressed to reduce file size, which inherently involves some loss of audio quality. Using a mega console for this purpose might be overkill because the subtle nuances and high-end features of such consoles may not be fully utilized or noticeable in the compressed MP3 format.

What are the emerging trends/technologies in song recording and mixing?

- Mixing using AI
- More realistic Instrument Sampling Technology like the Virtual Studio Technology (VST), Audio Units (AU), etc.
- Remote Collaboration Tools
- Spatial (Immersive) Audio



Vijay Rathinam

Are you using AI for post-production (soundtrack merging, dubbing, foley engineering)?

Yes. I am a Reaper user and reaper supports Lua scripting natively. So off late, I have been using ChatGPT to write Lua scripts for reaper that makes my workflow more efficient. This has given me amazing results to automate any mundane and repetitive tasks.

What are the emerging trends/technologies in post-production in general?

Immersive audio: This is certainly a trend. The fast adoption of immersive audio by major platforms has made it necessary for audio professionals to modify their existing workflows to accommodate the immersive audio needs. Also, sound library companies such as Pro Sound Effects are releasing immersive sound libraries which are quite helpful for sound editors.

AI driven audio restoration is another trend that's catching up. Several top brands are coming up with new plugins to make this possible. So certainly, this is an interesting space to look forward to.

Remote collaboration tools: The Pandemic made the necessity for remote collaboration ever more important. Tools that allow sound designers, editors, and mixers to collaborate have become even better than ever before and certainly there is a lot of scope for improvement. So, I am keeping a close eye on this trend as it continues to evolve.

Integration of Sound Design and Music: There is an increasing trend to blur the lines between sound design and musical score, creating seamless transitions to help support the film's narrative. Several film makers are taking this up into new and interesting directions.

Do you feel status and power of mega consoles brought recording engineers prestige? If yes, why? And if no, why?

The power of mega consoles doesn't bring recording engineers prestige in my humble opinion:

Skill Over Equipment: A skilled audio professional can achieve a great result on a smaller,

simpler setup. The quality of the final product is largely dependent on the artist's skill, taste, knowledge, and ear for sound.

Evolution of Technology: With the advent of digital audio workstations (DAWs) and high-quality plugins, many of the functions of a large console can be replicated in the digital domain. In many cases, DAWs offer even more flexibility and precision than analog equipment.

Modern Production Trends: Bedroom and home studios have produced many high-quality films and shows in recent years. These are often made with minimal equipment, highlighting that it's the creativity and talent of the individuals involved, rather than the equipment, that makes something stand out.

Portability and Flexibility: Smaller setups, including mobile rigs, allow audio professionals to work in a variety of environments and capture sounds that might not be achievable in a traditional studio. This flexibility can be a unique selling point for an artist. Imagine recording in a busy train station incognito!

Cost-Effectiveness: Mega consoles are extremely expensive. By achieving comparable results with more cost-effective gear, audio professionals can reduce overheads and potentially offer more competitive rates, making them more attractive to potential clients.

Maintenance: Large consoles require significant maintenance and can be more prone to issues simply due to the number of components. An engineer spending more time on maintenance might have less time for actual creative work.

Relationships Over Gear: Much of a sound designer's reputation and prestige comes from their ability to foster positive relationships with film makers, producers, and other crew members. Good communication, understanding a film maker's vision, and creating a comfortable working environment can be more valuable than having the most advanced equipment.

In conclusion, while mega consoles can be valuable tools in certain scenarios, the prestige of a sound designer comes from a combination of their good taste, skills, relationships, results, and reputation, rather than the sheer power or size of their equipment. The size doesn't matter.