

Well Made Music with Merging Technologies



It's fair to say music is in Dave Polster's blood. Not only a dedicated fan of new wave, psychedelic rock, American folk, indie rock and jazz, his career as a lacquer cutting engineer has led him to work with some of the world's greatest artists and on several Grammy Award-winning projects.

Driven by the 'timelessness of the recording and mastering process', Polster learned the craft of vinyl record manufacturing and expanded his music recording and engineering background at Gotta Groove Records in Cleveland, Ohio. He subsequently joined Well Made Music, in 2014, jumping at the chance of cutting master lacquers, the method which marks the final step in the creative mastering process and the first in the vinyl record manufacturing process.

Well Made Music is based in Bristol, Virginia and was founded in 2010 by Clint Holley. Using its two fully restored Neumann VMS-70 disc cutting lathes, the studio has since cut upwards of 10,000 lacquer masters, with cuts pressed at dozens of vinyl pressing plants around the world from recordings by eminent artists including Fleetwood Mac, the Notorious B.I.G., Billy Strings and Miles Davis.

In 2019, to complement the studio's lacquer cutting services, Senior Mastering Engineer, Polster introduced digital mastering and restoration - a transformational

move which led to the acquisition, in 2021, of a Merging Technologies HAPI unit and Pyramix Native Pro. This allowed the team to truly extend its digital lacquer cutting services from a pure DSD/ultra-high resolution PCM source, dramatically improving the clarity and transparency of its master lacquer cuts and prompting compliments from the studio's acclaimed artists and other discerning clients



Polster explains how the studio was first introduced to Merging Technologies' cutting-edge kit: "Paul Blakemore is an early pioneer of DSD and multi-Grammy award-winning mastering engineer at Concord Music in Nashville. We'd heard him rave about his Merging HORUS, referring to it as "the finest Digital-to-Analog conversion he has ever heard". Having auditioned hundreds of different converters over his 30+ years in professional audio, we knew that if Paul endorses something - it must be incredible!"

Polster and Holley were duly invited to Paul's studio to see his Merging rig in action; what they witnessed was game-changing. Determined to bring the same clarity and accuracy of DSD to their own cuts - without the risk of damaging irreplaceable analog master tapes - Polster later met with Merging representatives at the 2018 AES Conference in Virginia. Three years later, Well Made Music received its first HAPI unit and the equipment has been in daily use ever since, surpassing the quality of the studio's previous generation mastering-grade D/A conversion, with limited PCM playback.

Thanks to Pyramix Pro and HAPI, the team - Polster, Holley and Associate Cutting Engineers, Michael Fanos and Harrison Hunt - can now feed material into its Neumann SAL 74B lathe cutting amplifiers, replicating the full resolution of the

original source, with no signal degradation. As well as its DSD playback ability, Merging's Pyramix Pro and HAPI combination also allows Polster to send three discrete stereo outputs simultaneously to the cutting rig, conserving lacquer cutting space during quieter musical passages, thus optimizing groove spacing and depth.

Using a Cisco managed network switch and the highly flexible RAVENNA protocol for every cut, from PCM to DSD, Polster has integrated a second redundant cutting computer set-up, in the event of the main computer experiencing technical issues. He maintains it's as close to a "zero downtime" guarantee as any mastering studio can offer, allowing him to confidently quote project timelines and meet release deadlines with ease.

The studio's flagship project using Merging was the LP, 'By Myself', by renowned cellist, Abdul Wadud. Cut from DSD, the album was meticulously transferred from the original 1977 master tapes by Concord Music's Paul Blakemore, using a Merging HORUS and Pyramix. The sublime and long-awaited reissue was highly acclaimed by the New York Times, amongst others.

Eager to deepen their experience of Merging Technologies, Polster and his team at Well Made Music are excited at the prospect of Merging's new ANUBIS Premium, seeing it as a reasonably priced and accessible method of capturing pure DSD recordings and transfers: "ANUBIS Premium could be the key that allows us to source higher-resolution recordings from all over the world, confirms Polster. "These are exciting times we live in!"

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