

March 19, 2006

"The Trance Experience" by Torsten Fassbender



Finally, somebody lets musicians really "under the hood" for a full music production. In this case, German DJ [Torsten Fassbender](#) provides a "you are there" approach to three different mixes of one of his vocal trance songs (original, club, and chillout).

For a person who has really been exploring the genre the last three months, this is an eye-opener. You get a hardcover book in which Fassbender explains how he organizes, mixes and produces his tracks for each of these mixes, topped off with a set of six DVD's containing all the tracks, plug-ins, MIDI fills, presets, and audio files for several different sequencer formats.

It's amazing how they put together this project. Not only do you get all of the above on the DVD's, but you can decide how much of it you want to dump in your hard drive depending on how much horsepower you have for the full production. You can install the whole kit and kaboodle if your rig is at least dual chip powered and current, or a mixture of pre-recorded tracks and live ones, or purely bounced tracks that will use up very little CPU's. Be warned -- the files take a considerable amount of time to put on your hard drive.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT WARNING: this book is produced with the plug-in gods at Waves. Fassbender doesn't hesitate to shill these plug-ins, saying he's a big fan

of their top of the line Diamond Bundle (list price: \$3,800), and one of the discs allows you to install any of their bundles for a 14-day demo. Personally, I just did the Native Power pack, and I was able to get away with most of what I needed, using my own plug-ins for the rest. Waves plug-ins totally kick ass and are like audio surgical knives. However, after 14 days, all the plug-ins go back into demo mode, so you can either buy the bundle or use your own and tweak the settings to match theirs (which can definitely be done and is not hard to do, if you have the software). I'm going to buy the Native Power pack (\$375 street) plus the SuperTap6, as I do not own a multi-tap delay.

Back to the meat and potatoes: Fassbender share his templates for doing trance tracks, whereas you always have four different effects (long delay, short delay, long reverb, short reverb) and group your individual tracks depending on how you want to process them (bass, loops, drums, synths, vocals, fx, pads and synths). The guy is very organized and really knows his programming -- none of it is too deep, and with the presets ready to install, this is about as close as you will ever come to looking over a trance producer's shoulder.

Clearly, you can't know every single thought he has -- creation of the songs is not featured -- and sometimes you have to not only follow the book along with the tracks, but actually examine what he's doing AND hear the tracks to understand what he's after. The most common question you will ask when working with this book is: "Why?"

For example, Fassbender sets up a group track called "Filterbank," where he routes his kick, claps, cymbals and a couple of other things, and then attaches a Renaissance EQ2 with automation you can draw in or see for yourself in his demo tracks. For the life of me, I could not figure out what I would need a "Filterbank" grouping for until I followed his mix all the way through, watching that automated part of the group track -- it was actually an effect Fassbender uses in this particular song where most percussion drops out except the kick in a break.

There is an awful lot to get out of this book -- I find the best use is to really go back to it repeatedly, try firing up the different mixes and examine exactly what is going on in your mixer until it clicks in your head.

There are also some amazing participatory tutorials on sidechaining (which I never quite understood) and creating your own kicks that deserve admiration for covering all the bases.

The sweet touch is that you can communicate with Fassbender via his [message board](#) on the Waves web site. There, he's been getting all kinds of questions from people who bought the book, including me, asking him about the necessity of a sub bass for trance (his answer was no, only on progressive songs with slower BPM).

Overall, this is a deep book in which aspiring uplifting trance musicians, producers and mixers can get a lot from a pro without traveling to Europe and paying the guy to tutor you. In this case, it's \$80 US.