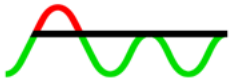
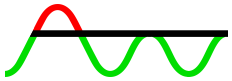


THE WRIGHT BALANCE METHOD

A philosophy of mastering, listening, and letting go.

by Alexander Wright



THE WRIGHT BALANCE METHOD

A philosophy of mastering, listening, and letting go.

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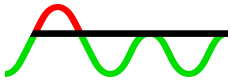
△ This symbol appears only here.
A quiet mark of structure, clarity, and
emotional fidelity — the foundations
of *The Wright Balance Method*.



PROLOGUE: THE WRIGHT BALANCE METHOD

This isn't a brand. It's not a framework. It's not even a philosophy, really. It's how I make sense of the world. And it's how I've come to live.

The Wright Balance Method is what emerged when I had to build a life around sensitivity, perfectionism, silence, and care. When I realized my deepest instincts—toward nuance, toward stillness, toward obsession—weren't flaws to correct, but qualities to cultivate.

It took years of unlearning. Years of trying to make music the way other people made it. Years of chasing bigness, slickness, approval. Until I finally understood: my gift wasn't in being loud. It was in being precise. In hearing what others missed. In trusting what I felt, even when it didn't show up on the meter.

That's what balance is.

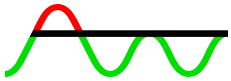
Not symmetry or neutrality. But an active equilibrium—between doing and not doing. Between detail and direction. Between knowing what's needed and knowing when to stop.

I think of Pollock, arms above the canvas, caught in the movement. I think of Riley's shifting lines, controlled yet chaotic. I think of Rothko's fields of color—not because they explain anything, but because they feel like something intentionally made to be remembered.

Mastering, for me, belongs in that lineage.

It's not engineering in the traditional sense. It's not even always musical. It's visceral. Emotional. Visual. It's about presence. Compassion. Surrender. Not to the client. Not to the trend. But to the music itself.

I don't expect everyone to resonate with that. But I know there are people out there—maybe you—who feel music this way. Who are overwhelmed by the world,



and steadied by sound. Who see beauty in tiny decisions. Who crave wholeness, not polish.

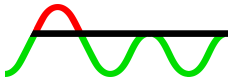
This method is for you.

It won't make you famous. It won't win you awards. But it might bring you peace. And it might remind you that invisible work, done with care, matters more than anything that trends.

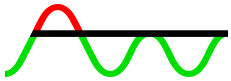
Let go of the need to prove yourself. Listen deeply and move with instinct. Trust that doing less, if done with care, can mean more.

That's what I've tried to do.

That's The Wright Balance..



PART 1: THE SELF



SECTION I: THE SHIFT

There's a moment in every project—not always dramatic, but unmistakable—when I stop imposing and start witnessing. I'm not adjusting a limiter. I'm not checking LUFS. I'm listening. Fully. Attuned to something just beneath the surface. It's the moment the work starts revealing what it wants to be and I get out of the way.

That moment is everything.

I've mastered over 1,600 releases: music spanning genres, cultures, and emotional registers. Some songs arrived raw, others refined. Some came with detailed references and spreadsheets. Others were sent with nothing but a blank email and a "Final Mix" attachment. But underneath it all, what I'm listening for never changes: the emotional center. The intention beneath the production. The truth of the song that even the artist might not have fully articulated.

Mastering, in its purest form, is not about correction or enhancement. It's about alignment. Not just with the artist's vision, but with the music itself—its shape, its weight, its feel.

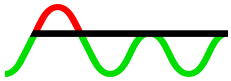
That's where the Wright Balance Method begins.

Not in hardware. Not in plugins. Not in a loudness target or frequency curve.

It begins in attention.

When I step into the studio, my first act isn't technical. It's a kind of listening that borders on stillness. I'm listening not just for what's there, but for what's barely there. The signal inside the signal.

I'm not a born technician, though I respect the craft. I'm not a spiritualist either. I'm someone who's learned—through necessity and repetition—to hear what's hiding in plain sight. Sometimes it's a fragile stereo image that needs



anchoring. Sometimes it's the ghost of a reverb tail that needs to fade just right. But more often, it's a feeling. An emotional fingerprint.

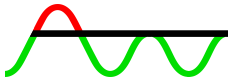
The Wright Balance is a way of responding to that fingerprint without smudging it.

Sometimes that means a 0.2 dB dip at 6k. Sometimes it means nothing at all.

The work doesn't always announce itself. The best masters rarely do. They don't draw attention. They disappear: into the song, the story, and the moment.

That's not mysticism. That's discipline. That's taste. That's years of failure, of trial, of refinement. But most of all, it's listening—deeply, deliberately, and without ego.

Because in mastering, magic isn't added. It's preserved.



SECTION II: THE CRAFT AND THE CALLING

I never planned on becoming a mastering engineer.

As a kid, I wanted to write books. Maybe study philosophy, even fashion. At different points I thought I'd be a guitarist, a designer, or a recluse on some coastline reading Neruda and ignoring the internet. But the thing that stayed—the thread that never let go—was listening. Listening to music constantly. Deeply. Obsessively. And eventually, professionally.

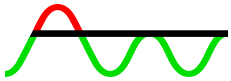
That's what mastering became for me: a formal way to express that love for the art and that kind of listening. To make it real and to truly do what I love for a living.

It's not just polishing audio. It's not about making things "louder" or "brighter." Mastering is the final act of care. A responsibility. A quiet kind of craftsmanship that leaves no signature, only a sense of rightness. (I really am sorry for the pun in the Method's name, by the way, but as they say in poker: "don't sit on your hand.")

Yes, there's technique. Yes, I know my gear. I've spent entire days pondering a 0.1 dB difference between two limiters. I've trained my ears to identify a frequency blindfolded. I can tell you with reliable accuracy what the fundamental frequency of that annoying whistle outside is—but that's not the point. The point is restraint. Taste. Knowing when to act and when to stop. Knowing that every dB carries consequence.

Early on, I wanted to impress people. I wanted clients to say, "This sounds amazing" as though I'd somehow reinvented their song. Over time, I realized the real compliment—the one that matters—is "This feels right." Because that's when the work disappears. That's when the master isn't noticeable, just inevitable.

Getting to that place took unlearning. I had to dismantle the urge to be clever. To leave a mark. I had to let go of the producer in me, the fan in me, the impulse to inject myself into the work. Mastering isn't about me. It's about the music becoming itself in the most natural way.



That kind of minimalism doesn't come to me easily, perfectionistic as I can be. It costs something to hold back.

There have been moments where I doubted my ears, my process, myself. Days where the speakers felt wrong, and so did I. I've spent hours manually removing clicks, background rumble, mouth noises, the faintest buzz of a badly grounded guitar pickup no one else noticed. Chasing ghosts in the noise because silence, to me, should be spotless. I've resisted the direction of projects when the artist insisted on loudness I found detrimental and fatiguing. And I've come back every time, a day later, to try again—humbler, clearer.

This work has tested me. And it's saved me.

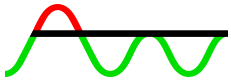
I left school at 16, wrecked by panic attacks. For six years, I barely existed in the world. I didn't go to parties. I didn't socialize. I didn't have a plan. I read. I hiked. I wrote poetry in overstuffed journals. I produced electronic music and fruitlessly searched for my own sound. I listened to rain and static and birdsong and albums like lifelines. During that time, as I worked on getting healthier, I wasn't preparing to be an engineer—I was learning about myself and about the world. Finding the heart of what drives me.

Eventually, at 22, I got my GED, flew to Boston, and auditioned for Berklee. I was bald from stress, older than most seniors, and terrified I didn't belong. But I knew that if I applied myself, I could make it. And I did—into their smallest, most competitive program.

And I made a life.

The Wright Balance Method is born from that life—not as an idea, but as a way of being. A way of noticing. A way of carrying other people's art with care, even when no one's looking.

This is the craft. I took the road less travelled, and this is where it led.



SECTION III: THE AMERICAN DREAM

I grew up in Australia by the coast, raised in a loving home. My early childhood was idyllic in many ways and full of good music. But as I got older, something shifted.

I was sensitive, precocious, wired differently. But I didn't know that yet. All I knew was that school made me sick—literally. I had panic attacks that left me on the floor, OCD rituals that drained me, and a constant pressure to pretend everything was fine. By sixteen, I had functionally collapsed. I left school and disappeared from the world for a while.

From sixteen to twenty-two, I felt completely alone.

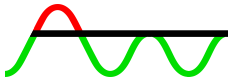
Not because I wasn't loved, but because I couldn't connect. Almost like an isolated self in a locked room.

But even then, there was a dream forming. I have always been ambitious and that kept a flame burning inside me. I remember reading On the Road under Australian skies at sixteen—sunburnt, sleepless, listening to Jason Molina in my headphones—and feeling something light up. America wasn't just a country. It was a current. A myth. A messy, wild, glorious possibility.

The vast majority of the music I loved most—the records that had always felt like lifelines—didn't just come from America. They could only have come from America. Motown. The Beach Boys. Wilco. Cat Power. A Tribe Called Quest. OutKast. Brian Jonestown Massacre. MGMT. LCD Soundsystem. Elliott Smith. It was a place where contradiction became culture. Where the beautiful and broken collided into sound.

And somehow, I wanted to be part of that.

Not for fame. Not for money. But because I believed, naïvely and completely, that the kind of life I wanted to build—artistic, independent, authentic—had a



home in that chaos. That maybe I could carve a place inside that myth alongside many misfits before me.

I didn't know I was autistic. No one around me did either. They saw anxiety, depression, withdrawal. But under all of that was a lifelong sensory hypersensitivity, pattern obsession, and social masking so deep I forgot I was wearing a mask at all.

Mastering became a place I could exist without pretending. A place where hypersensitivity was an asset, not a liability. Where solitude wasn't loneliness, it was essential clarity. Where I could focus on something real, and shape it carefully, and send it out into the world without having to be seen or judged.

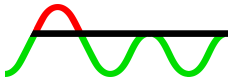
When I was accepted into Berklee (specifically the Music Production and Engineering program) it changed everything. A few semesters in, I began to feel I had been given the language, the tools, and the mentors to shape this deep listening into a profession.

Since then, I've stood in studios in New York with gold records older than me hanging on the walls, watched Seattle clouds shift above mixing rooms where legends once sat, felt the addictive thrill of Hollywood, and toured backstage at arena shows meeting people whose faces I saw on TV when I was a child. There are moments I've lived here—brief, impossible moments—that would never happen anywhere else. Surreal collisions of art and commerce, pain and joy, heartbreak and volume.

This is a land of great complexity and opportunity. I came here because of both and because of the immense beauty I find in the promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." I am proud to now be a dual citizen and an Australian-American.

And somewhere along the way, I met Maya.

I'd stopped looking for love in the wrong places. Then I found my soulmate in the country I moved to chasing music and meaning. She is the strongest person I know. Brilliant, kind, intuitive, and comforting in a way that steadies me. Whatever this journey has been—through studios, sleepless nights, and setbacks—her



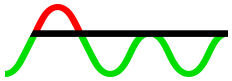
presence has given me the strength to see it through. Love like that doesn't just walk beside your work. It transforms the reason you do it.

Maya didn't just become part of my story, she helped me believe it was one worth telling.

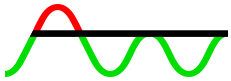
When people ask how I became a mastering engineer, I never quite know what to say. I could list the credits. The gear. The details. But the truth is, I became a mastering engineer because I needed a quiet space where I could do careful, meaningful work—and build a life around it.

And I made one.

This is that place.



PART 2: THE WORK



SECTION IV: TRANSLATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE

I've always been fascinated by the act of translation. Not just between languages and cultures, but between spaces. Emotions into words. Intention into sound. Headphones into car speakers.

That's the core of mastering: translation without compromise.

You're not just balancing a mix, you're carrying it across thresholds while making sure it survives the journey. Ensuring that the emotion you felt on your studio monitors survives earbuds, phone speakers, playlists, normalization, and algorithmic chaos.

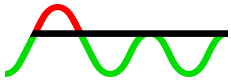
Most people reduce this to loudness or frequency balance. But real translation is subtler and far harder to learn. It's knowing how to preserve feel under pressure. How to navigate and solve an apparent contradiction like widening the dynamic range of a piece while making it substantially louder. How to hold space for intimacy without sacrificing clarity.

This is where taste and discernment shows. Not in presets or plugin chains, but in restraint. Knowing what not to do.

When I started out, I used to chase clarity. Now I chase coherence. There's a big difference.

Clarity is a product of balance. Coherence is a product of trust—in the mix, in the song, in yourself. If a track is warm and dark and reminds me of Slint's Spiderland, I don't reach for high-end sparkle just to match a reference. If the artist meant it to be raw, I let it bleed.

Translation doesn't mean compromise. It means context, and a constant awareness and respect for that context.



A master that sounds “huge” but clouds the artist’s voice is a failure. A master that moves you—even if it's not pristine—is a success.

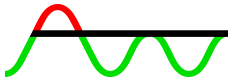
One of my favorite things to hear is, “This sounds like us, only better.” That’s when I know I’ve done my job.

It takes time to work this way. It means sitting with the music longer. It means saying no to shortcuts, presets, or typical workflows. It means trusting your ears above anything else.

I’ve had clients ask why their song isn’t as loud as others on Spotify. I walk them through normalization, perceived loudness, the dangers of RMS flattening. I explain that I’m not just chasing volume, I’m protecting feel. Striking a balance.

Some get it. Some don’t.
But I don’t flinch anymore.

Because translation, done right, doesn’t erase the original. It extends it. It opens the door for more people to feel what the artist felt. I believe that’s the core of what mastering is intended to achieve.



SECTION V: BEFORE MASTERING

I don't expect perfection when a mix arrives. I do expect personality.

I expect to hear a point of view—however fragile, bold, understated, or eccentric it may be. And I can usually tell, within seconds, whether a mix has been shaped with care or cobbled together. Whether the artist, mixer, or producer listened all the way through or sent the "good enough" mix at 2 a.m. Whether the final bounce was printed from a place of confidence or compromise.

I don't judge. I don't scoff. But I do respond to my clients. Because music is communication and mastering is a response. If something feels like it could be done in a better way or there are workable methods to improve the mix on their end, I'll explore those thoughts with the mixing engineer.

Before I touch a single control, I try to meet the song on its terms. And to do that, I listen to the mix as you'd read a letter or a journal entry sent by a friend: a message from someone trying to say something that means a lot to them. My job is to hear what was meant—not just what made it onto the page.

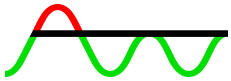
"Music is life itself. What you hear in a song is everything that person has lived until that moment."

—Ryuichi Sakamoto

So when people ask me, "What makes a mix ready for mastering?" they're often expecting a checklist. And while there are technical aspects (we'll get to them), the real answer is emotional readiness.

A master-ready mix feels intentional. Not flawless—intentional. It's a mix where the choices are defined and defended. Where someone said: "this is what I want you to feel."

That intention might be messy. It might be dry and jagged. Or lush and saturated. It might be quiet. But if it's true and the art is clear, I can work with it. I can honor it.



What's hardest to work with is uncertainty. A mix that's been over-processed trying to impress. Or flattened by last-minute changes to please too many voices. Or a mix delivered with a note that says, "Sorry this isn't quite right." When the person sending it doesn't trust the mix, we start from a place of uncertainty and fear.

This is not to blame or shame. I've been there. I've printed mixes at 3 a.m. that I wasn't proud of. I've second-guessed myself into paralysis. That's why I try to approach every mix I receive with compassion first.

Still, there are some practical truths I wish more artists, mixers, and producers knew—not as critiques, but as encouragement:

Headroom is not magic. A mix doesn't need to peak at -6 dB to be good. It just needs to avoid unnecessary clipping or limiting. Give me space to work, not superstition.

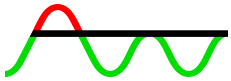
Mastering won't fix balance issues. If the vocal is buried, it'll stay buried. If the kick and bass are fighting, they'll keep fighting. I can smooth the edges but I can't redo the mix.

You don't need a bus compressor just to "glue" things. Glue comes from arrangement, tone, and movement. If your mix breathes on its own, let it.

Reference tracks are useful, but they're not targets—they're touchstones. A way to say: "Here's the feeling I want." Not: "Make it sound like this."

What I wish most is that more artists understood how alive the mix sounds when it lands on my desk. You've been listening to it in loops, in buses, in headphones, in DAWs. You've lived inside it. By the time it reaches me, you might be numb.

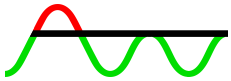
But I'm hearing it for the first time.
That's a sacred moment.



I'm not here to fix your art. I'm here to join it, briefly, and guide it across the finish line. So the more confidently you can say, "This is what we made," the more clearly I can say, "I hear it."

And when the mix is right—not flawless, but honest—it's like stepping into a room where every light has quietly come on. Suddenly, the space makes sense. I know where to walk, where to sit, where to listen.

That's the kind of mix I wish for every artist: one that knows what it is, and trusts that it matters.



SECTION VI: THE ENGINEER AS WITNESS

I used to think my job was to fix things.
Make them cleaner. Louder. Better.

But over time, I came to understand something quieter, more profound: I'm not here to fix. I'm here to witness.

Not like a priest. Not like a judge. More like a field recorder in the right place at the right time—or a framer, carefully positioning and presenting a work of art.

I listen. I interpret. I translate. And then I let go.

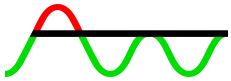
Rick Rubin talks about this often, the idea of the engineer as a conduit. As someone who holds the space without crowding it. It took me years to grasp that concept. The usual impulse is to act. To prove your presence. To show you can do something.

But the best work doesn't need to show itself. The best masters disappear.

Presence replaced pressure. Curiosity replaced correction. And somehow, what emerged was more alive.

That doesn't mean I don't reach for tools. I do.

I've chased release times on Unisum for hours, trying to get just 1% more clarity from the impact of a kick. I've auditioned EQ curves on the Dangerous BAX and Weiss EQ1 late into the night, not to shape a new sound, but to honor the one already there as best I can. Sometimes Gold Clip is the only tool that can anchor a thin mix without suffocating its energy. Sometimes a whisper of the Manley Vari-Mu adds the warmth of a sound in your memory you didn't know you missed. I'll swap between the Shadow Hills, the SPL Iron, and the Fairchild 670 depending on whether the song asks to stand taller or fall inward.



This isn't a gear list, it's a record of how I listen. Of how tools become gestures, and gestures become trust.

What I've learned is that gear can't give you taste. And no setting can replace attention. The more tools I've acquired, the more selective I've had to become. Because when you can reach for anything, the temptation is to reach for everything.

But the music doesn't need everything. It needs the right thing.

That's where trust comes in. Trust in your ears. In your instinct. In what you know about your gear and how best to use it in each instance.

When I think of the engineers I admire—Jonathan Wyner, Bob Ludwig, Mandy Parnell, Greg Calbi—it's not their gear I remember. It's their restraint. Their refusal to impose. Their ability to know when to act and when to step away.

I've had to learn that too. Not just in mastering, but in life.

To know when I'm reaching for the Weiss DS1-MK3 because it serves the song, or when I'm reaching because I feel uncertain and want to prove I can still add to this mix.

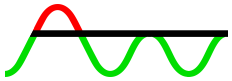
This kind of honesty took years. And it wasn't just about sound, it was about self.

Years of anxiety. OCD. Hyper-attunement. A sensitivity so extreme I thought it was weakness. Now I know: it's the thing that makes my work what it is.

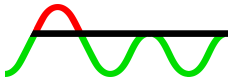
That's why I call it The Wright Balance. Not because I've mastered it, but because I return to it—every day, every song.

It's not a brand. It's a practice.

Of noticing. Of listening. Of letting go.



PART 3: THE MEANING



SECTION VII: SONIC MEMORY

Songs don't just play. They hold space.

They hold seasons of life, conversations, heartbreaks, recoveries. And as a mastering engineer, I often find myself not just preparing sound for release—but preserving a moment in time.

Basquiat once said, "Music is how art decorates time." I think about that phrase every day. Because every track I work on isn't just sound, it's a timestamp. A moment someone lived through and chose to capture.

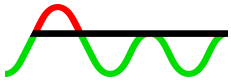
I don't think artists always realize that's what they're doing. But I do. Every file that lands in my inbox is a kind of time capsule. And once I master it, that capsule gets sealed. The world moves on, but the music stays: a record of feeling, intent, presence.

There are projects I've worked on that I can't revisit without recalling the room I was in, the weather that day, the way our dog Ozzy shifted in his sleep under my desk. I can't hear them without remembering who I was in that season —what I was carrying, or trying to let go of.

I remember the EP a client made after losing his brother. I still think about the vocal that cracked mid-chorus, just barely, and how we chose not to fix it. It broke me open in the best way.

I remember a single from a young artist that came in with no credits, no budget, no social presence—but it was the most honest thing I heard that month. That track made me feel like I was 19 again, wandering a train station in Europe with headphones on and nowhere to be.

I remember an album imperfectly recorded and mixed in the back of a tour van, patched together in fragments between load-ins, that somehow felt more cohesive than most records tracked in million-dollar studios. It sounded like motion, friendship, life being lived.



Not every single song stays with me. Some slip away with time—but a fair few will linger in the air for the rest of my life. A few live in the part of my brain where emotion meets memory, where sound becomes sense. And those are the ones that remind me why I do this.

Mastering is not just about technical finalization. It's about emotional finalization. It's a chance to say: this is what it sounded like then. Not now, not later—then. This is what we felt. This is who we were. And that's worth preserving.

The waveform becomes an artifact. The RMS level, a boundary around a chapter. The tone curve, a fingerprint of a life, captured for a moment, then released into the cumulative body of human expression.

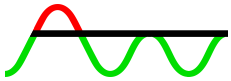
People say "music is timeless," but I think it's more accurate to say: music has a memory.

It remembers where you were when you first heard it. Who you loved. What you lost. What you hoped. And the more faithfully I can preserve those emotional cues—the more I can keep the music alive rather than simply loud—the more likely it is to survive as memory.

Not just in the minds of the listeners. But in the hearts of the people who made it.

That's why this job matters. Because when it's done with care, mastering becomes more than a step. It becomes a kind of quiet archival. Not of data but of feeling.

And feeling is what survives.



SECTION VIII: MONO NO AWARE

There's a Japanese aesthetic principle that has stayed with me for years: mono no aware. Often translated as "the pathos of things," it speaks to the gentle ache of impermanence—the beauty of knowing something won't last.

Cherry blossoms falling. A favorite song fading out. A moment you didn't realize would be your last until it was.

Mastering lives in that space.

Of all the stages in music-making, mastering is the only one defined by its finality. It's the last time a human touches the song before it enters the world. The last breath before release.

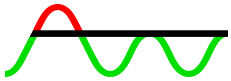
That awareness shapes how I work. I don't see mastering as finishing. I see it as honoring.

I've worked on tracks that were the last thing an artist recorded before they passed away. I've mastered breakup albums, grief albums, love letters never sent. Sometimes a mix arrives carrying more than just audio. There's a tension in the transitions. A quietness between phrases. A weight that doesn't come from compression.

No one says it out loud, but I can feel it—an emotional residue, like the song is holding something it hasn't let go of yet.

You can't EQ that. But you can listen for it and treat it with integrity.

To work well at this stage, I have to let go of any illusion of control. I'm not sculpting marble. I'm tending to something living. Which means I need a mindset closer to zanshin—a Zen term for a state of relaxed alertness. Present, but not reactive. Focused, but not forceful.



Artists like Hiroshi Yoshida and philosophers like Dōgen Zenji understood this duality—the tension between care and detachment, intention and release. Rothko's work resonates with the same awareness: simplicity that hums with depth. Bridget Riley and Carlos Cruz-Diez, too, understood that perception is fluid; that what seems minimal can be deeply profound if you pay close enough attention.

That's what I'm doing when I master: trying to shift and engage the listener without them noticing how or even why.

Not every record calls for that level of attention, but I bring it anyway. Even when the mix is rough. Even when the arrangement feels rushed. Because someone, somewhere, believed this music mattered enough to finish, and out of all the engineers in the world they trusted me with it.

That means a great deal to me.

There's a part of my process I have never discussed publicly: a quiet moment before I render, where I acknowledge the piece—just for myself. A kind of internal bow, humbled and grateful for my role. Because the music won't stay here. It's already moving on. But while it's in my hands, I treat it like it's the last thing that will ever be made.

Maybe that's too sentimental. Maybe not.
Either way, I'll keep doing it.

Because impermanence isn't a flaw in the process—it is the process.

EPILOGUE: A FINAL NOTE

If you've made it this far, thank you. Not just for reading, but for listening.

For caring about sound in a way that goes beyond levels and loudness. For believing, as I do, that music matters because people matter. And that the smallest details of things aren't just technical; they're emotional, important, and human.

I've spent years trying to find the right words for what I do—not to sell it or simplify it, but to understand it. To give shape to my business in a way that feels true. To communicate a process that's both technical and emotional, without losing either.

This piece of writing is my best attempt. Not a manual or a manifesto, just an offering. A reflection of how I work, why I care, and what I've learned by listening closely—for years, for hours, for the smallest clues that something matters.

So whether you're an artist, an engineer, a listener—or someone who's walked their own crooked road toward peace—I hope something in these pages met you where you are.

Before I close, I want to leave you with a few words that have sat with me for years. They're from the author and poet Charles Bukowski:

"What matters most is how well you walk through the fire."

To me, that's what music is. Gladness. Memory. Defiance. Beauty. Held, for a moment, against the fire.

That's what I try to preserve. And it's the intent at the heart of this method: to meet each song with care, and let it go with dignity.

With gratitude,
Alexander Wright △