IS YOUR

iPod

A WELCOME PARTY GUEST?

THIS ADVICE IS FOR EVERYONE planning to use their iPod as the principal music source for any large sound system - be it party or event, teaching aerobics and exercise classes or other "professional" purposes. This is now the norm all over the world, so it's worth reviewing how to get the most out of the MP3 music files in iTunes and on your iPod.

Let's start at the beginning. The music you will use has either come into your possession as a CD or as a download from a music web site. The first thing to understand about MP3 compressed music files is the bit rate, the kbps (kilobytes per second) of the digital music data stream. iTunes Store downloads start at 128kbps, which is adequate for listening to music on the bus or while jogging, for example, but there are compromises involved in compressing music down to that size.

Rule 1: Always import your music into iTunes @ 256kbps or higher.

While still not quite CD-quality, 256kbps MP3 tracks retain much more information than 128kbps tracks and are nearly impossible to distinguish from CD. So, what did you lose with the halved bit rate in your 128kbps download? Clean bass notes and bass drum beats for a start – their loud peaks sound like rounded, ill-defined blurs – and when amplified to a typical playback volume can sometimes come out with what can only be described as a 'farting', distorted bass sound. In more gentle music the breathy detail of a solo flute or the decay of a single piano note is shortened. Put simply, there are losses of detail at both ends of the 'loudness' spectrum.

Importing at 256kpbs will create bigger files that take up more storage space on your computer and your iPod, but the results you hear will be closer to CD quality and not back to the bad old days of sounding like you're using cassettes for your music. In iTunes 8 the import settings can be found by going to iTunes->Preferences->General->Import Settings and selecting 'Custom' from the drop-down menu. If using other software, search the program's help file for 'bit rate' or 'import settings'.

Rule 2: Use a volume equaliser program when assembling your own playlist.

If you are using a well produced music CD transferred to your iPod via iTunes then you shouldn't have to worry about the volume jumping up and down between tracks as this will have already been adjusted in the Mastering process.
However, if you want to assemble your own soundtrack, the volume of each track has to be treated and individually adjusted to the same average setting. iTunes has a 'Soundcheck' feature, for more consistent results you may want to purchase volume-specific software, such as iVolume (www.mani.de/ivolume/), which is quick, easy and does a good job.

There are other programs available on the market, so search around for one that suits you.
Once you have your music playlist transferred to your iPod, you're ready to go.
The sound system you are using should have one of two options to allow you to use your player. The simplest is a 'floating' cable connected to the mixer with the mini plug hanging there, or as with the Aeromix mixer, there's a socket on the front with a white cable provided – so you plug this into the headphone socket and press play – is that right? **NO!** First you must check the player's settings to make sure you'll get a good result – so press the 'Menu' button on your iPod until you can see and select 'Settings'.

Rule 3: Check the following settings on your player before you hit play!

Shuffle should be OFF – you don't want a random order of music tracks coming out- well, you might so up to you.
Repeat should be OFF as well – you don't want the playlist starting again as soon as you've finished
Volume limit should be set to MAXimum – you turn it down to protect your hearing, but with a sound system you have to turn it up to the max to generate the volume needed by the system and to get closer to the CD player's loudness.
EQ reset to OFF or FLAT – all those different EQ settings are designed to make your music sound good when you are using the earphones supplied, but through a professional sound system and good quality audio mixer amplifiers and loudspeakers they can make the music sound 'mushy'. It's best to leave the system sound to the mixer, not the player.
Soundcheck should be ON – this is important as it works with the volume levelling software to maintain a more even volume between tracks.

There's a lot more to making the most of your iPod for music playback than simply plugging it in and pressing play – as with so many things, preparation is everything and when you have gone to the trouble of finding the perfect hire sound system it is a small step to get it right.

One last thing... don't forget to charge your ipod if it is going to be running from battery all night!

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