SONGCHECKS ⦿

Your name: LLC
Song name: One Step At A Time

First impressions (30-sec snap judgment A&R listen)
- I really dig the overall vibe of this track.
- The vocal performance is energetic and believable.
- The low-frequency energy of the bass is excellent. Great job.
- The arrangement and instrumentation also kept my attention all the way through.

Overall thoughts on the mix
- Sonically speaking, my first impression was that the whole mix sounded a little bit scooped in the midrange. This is forcing a lot of elements to live in the same sonic range and blend together too much.
- It's also a little light in the top-end energy (cymbals and such).
- The vocal also sounded unnaturally sibilant and lispy at the same time.
- As far as the musical elements go, there seemed to be some sections that were a little overkill. Too many things going on at once and it was hard to focus on what the main idea was.

Section by section thoughts
- INTRO
  - The intro is fun to listen to. I dig the filter effects.
  - One thing that kind of caught me off guard up front was the hard-panned drum loops. Try to bring them in a little bit. Maybe 70% on each side.

- VERSES
  - The verse could really benefit from some room sounds on the drums. It's kind of hard to dig a natural type vibe when it sounds like the drums are just dry samples coming out of the speakers.
  - Try to figure out that vocal EQ.
  - It would be great if that guitar in the center could find its own space so that it could be heard more clearly. It's a fun part and it's a shame to have it in the background.
  - On the plus side, the main guitars have a really good punch to them and the background harmony vocals are a perfect balance with the main.

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- PRE-CHORUS
  - Once we get to the pre-chorus, the low end of the bass guitar starts to overtake the track. This is making the main rhythm guitars difficult to hear.
  - A more defined hi-hat sound would really help the groove as well.
  - Again, maybe if there was a little more midrange definition it would be clearer.
  - Vocal balance is perfect. Sitting on top the entire time. That's exactly where you want them to be.
  - I'd probably edit the drums and add my own crashes.
  - And add perc-shaker/tambo for subdivision energy.

- CHORUS
  - The chorus has a nice initial lift of energy.
  - Overall, it could benefit from some of that high-end energy and a little more room on the drums. It would just sound so much cooler if the drums sounded like they were in a physical space. I shouldn't be questioning whether or not he's hitting a cymbal or not. ;-)
  - The guitar tone for the rhythm and overdub tracks may be too similar as well. It's hard to differentiate them.

- POST CHORUS
  - The post-chorus/re-intro would be a great place to dial back the energy so there's a little relief between the "full-on" chorus and upbeat second verse. It sounds like the elements are trying to do that, but it also sounds like it could be dialed back a bit.

- SECOND CHORUS
  - The second verse sits really nicely and the balance is good between the instruments.
  - I love the dropout section with the drum loops and bass. Three Thumbs Up.

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- SECOND PRE-CHORUS
  - The guitar tone in the second pre-chorus might be taking up too much sonic energy.
  - The toms are really having trouble sticking. I can hear just a little bit of the attack/point coming through.

- BRIDGE
  - The bridge is the first place where I start to hear a vocal clarity issue. There's a lot going on and each part is very important to help lift each modulation.
  - Great background vocal arrangement. Feature it!

- LAST CHORUS
  - Once we get to the repeat chorus, this is where I start to get overwhelmed with elements. Gang vocals, counter melody, chunky guitars, breakdown drum beat... it's a lot all at once.
  - I'm not saying that you can't pull it off, but you need to do some serious carving to make it all fit clearly.

What rules (things you nailed)
  - The overall arrangement and instrumentation are well done. It kept me entertained through the whole song and the elements were perfectly selected. Vocals had great energy and were exciting to listen to all the way through.

What does not (things we need to work on)
  - I think the thing that needs to be worked on is the overall clarity. Try to shape the mid-range in a more meaningful way. Instruments, like guitar, seem to take up too much information, not leaving much space for anything else. Drums are suffering from a lack of environment and top-end energy in the cymbals. Vocals need a little more midrange to get rid of that lisp and a de-esser to tame down the unnatural hype.

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What would I reference if I was mixing this?
- I think a great mix reference for this song would be Neon Trees' "Animal". Although they use electronic drums, you get the overall feeling of a well-balanced low end, and clarity/separation in all the instruments. The vocal is upfront and present, without being unnaturally hyped. The overall EQ balance on that mix is more in line with what I think would suit this song.

Overall mix rating: scale of 1 - 10 (1= remix it, 10= Grammy time)
- I'd give this one 5/10.
- It's not terrible, by any means. Improved clarity between instruments, more atmosphere on the drums, and less-hyped vocals could easily get this mix another point.

Final thoughts
- Without reading your provided comments, I would've had no idea there was a guest singer on this track. I would have bet my life it was just one guy. Do you really sound that similar?
- If your mixer is about to drop the hammer on mix notes, I'd say prioritizing the vocal EQ would be best.
- Maybe if you offer to buy him pizza, he'll do a little tweak on the bass/guitars to help things sit a little better.
- Again, the mix isn't terrible, but these few problematic areas are keeping it from standing out.
- Good luck with the project!

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