



Microphone Choices:

The Misfit Grab Bag (and Meeting Your Match)...

“At The Harmonica Microphone Bench” with Fritz Hasenpusch, Mel Bay’s HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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So...The Harpmobile’s roll along the scenic routes through the vast territories of “The Dynamic Zone” has shown us many modern day candidates for canonization in the Promised Land of SOUND and WORKABILITY. Unbeknownst to Ben Bauer and Ernie Seeler, later day deities in the Pantheon of the Dynamic Microphone, their designs (notably the Shure Unidyne family) would become favored weapons in bringing amplified music to the world and Saint Harmonica to the masses. As with Henry Ford and the automobile or Werner Von Braun and the multi-stage rocket, their designs would influence countless others ever since...

BUT... Beyond the well-lit territories of the modern Dynamic Empire lie pockets of development that are both new and old. Shadowy, sometimes mysterious Techno-settlements that may seem disparate at first glance, but that share remarkable parallels in their origins and unlikely similarities in their relationship with the Tin Sandwich: The Ribbon and Condenser Clans.

Let’s hop into the Wayback Machine for some background. Note: There are very detailed and thorough histories that deal with the following examples. Consider this offering as Intro-lite: 1a... Ribbon (“velocity” or “gradient”) microphones and Condenser (“capacitance”) microphones both owe much of their development on this side of The Pond to RCA (Radio Corporation of America) and Princeton Laboratories. In the early days of evolving audio technology, the Ribbon and the Condenser were seen as the next steps in natural sound transduction and as the heirs apparent to the position occupied by the carbon mics that were in use at the time. The big “box camera” RCA 4Aa condenser began showing up in newsreel footage around 1930. The earliest RCA ribbons made for the film industry (the PB17) were introduced in 1932. The more familiar 44 and 77 models (the “Shick Shaver” and “Big Pill”) bowed in 1933 and 1936 respectively. Both carbon mics and condenser mics require external power supplies to operate, while the ribbon design does not. One might wonder if it was this design aspect that led RCA to concentrate its efforts toward the Ribbon and leave the Europeans as the chief proponents of the Condenser’s development. Champagne for AKG, Neumann, Beyer, and Telefunken, please. Later, it would be Sony that would further the development and popularization of the electret-condenser along with the miniaturization of the condenser mic for lavalier applications.

OK, so what about Saint Harmonica? Both of these designs see varied use with our patron saint. Example One: The first time I met Lee Oskar, he was on tour with War playing in Honolulu, Hawaii. He was excitedly proclaiming that his own line of harmonicas was soon to be released. When asked about his mic preference, he patiently explained that his choice was an unusual one: a Beyer ribbon model, either a 160 or 260. Example Two: The

first time I saw “Madcat” Ruth, he was touring with the Brubeck family. He had what appeared to be an electret-condenser taped to his hand, its cable taped to his arm... Heresy? Nope, Resourcefulness! We’ll look deeper into this provocative line of methodology and attack... Next time, on THE MIC BENCH.

For pictures and descriptions of most of the microphones listed visit
http://www.harmonicamasterclass.com/vintage_collection.htm

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