



## Welcome & Introduction

“At The Harmonica Microphone Bench” with Fritz Hasenpusch, [www.harmonicassessions.com](http://www.harmonicassessions.com)

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The harmonica's relationship with the microphone and its technology has always seemed to be like the spiraling grooves of an old record: So very close, always moving along together, but never truly connected. It's been an ongoing - if sometimes uneasy - parallel. From the very beginnings of electronic audio amplification, radio broadcasting, and sound recording, the microphone in its various forms has stood as a witness to the music of the harmonica, relaying what it hears to those listening through distance and time. It's a pretty amazing thing when you stop and give it some thought... So much of the harp you and I have heard originating from players other than ourselves (and certainly ALL recorded harmonica!) has made a circuitous journey that's taken it through at least one microphone. Whether it's DeFord Bailey on WSN at The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Little Walter at the Chess studios in Chicago, or some young harpslinger hopeful honking 10PM 'til 2AM down at the Oasis Lounge, there's at least one microphone between their harp and your ears.

Yes, the harmonica as an acoustic instrument has distinct advantages in its effort to be heard: It's fairly directional, in that most of its sound is directed away from the player and projected outward by the reedplate covers, much like the bell of a sax directs its output. The metallic reeds themselves have the ability to cut through ambient noise and be heard in environments you wouldn't think it possible. Ever been to a concert in an arena and heard the plaintive cry of someone with a harp playing along (in the wrong key) up in the nosebleed section? Amazing what this little instrument can do...

But, when it comes to REALLY being heard: Mr. Harmonica, shake hands with Lord Microphone... and back to those uneasy parallel paths they travel. For, unlike the magnetic pick-ups on an electric guitar which were designed for the specific purpose of sensing the vibrations of the guitar's metallic strings, the microphone is a device that was developed by and large to register vibrations in the air (initially the human voice) that we all know as "sound", mimicking our own ears. That's a pretty general-purpose description. For the harp player who wishes to be heard, it's a tool that must be adapted to their purpose. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the side of creativity, the microphone and its adaptation for harmonica has opened an amazingly wide door of opportunity with regards to the modeling and shaping of the instrument's "voice". Various types of mic transducers "hear" the sound source differently; react differently under a variety of conditions and circumstances, yielding a broad variety of response curves. They will even interact differently with the equipment they are being fed into (more on that later). BUT! The very fact that they are sensitive to the vibrations within the environment in which they are being used presents some specific obstacles for the amplified harpster (more on "FEEDBACK" later). Yep, it gets pretty complicated... Better fasten your seatbelt!

The alchemy of Lord Microphone, its purpose and function, construction and design, problems and troubleshooting, along with care and feeding are all subjects I'll be covering. Got a general topic or specific question? Let me know: [harpmicman@earthlink.net](mailto:harpmicman@earthlink.net).

Fritz - The Harp Mic Man