



Microphone Choices:

The HI-FI/LOW-FI Variations (or, HUMVEE in the Fastlane)...

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

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Our Harpmobile is cruising through what seems to be the largest of the newer suburbs on the microphone landscape, “The Dynamic Zone.” Like driving in LA, it’s tuff to tell just how big this ‘burg’ is by simply looking at it through a windshield. Just for a moment, let’s trade-in the Harpmobile for a Harpcopter, head upstairs and take a traffic reporter’s eye view of the sprawl. YEOW! Although we can’t make out the distant borders (and actual production totals are hard to come by), one professional guesstimate puts the Dynamic’s slice of the current microphone market at 70%. That’s a HUGE piece of the action...

Back in the friendly confines of the Harpmobile we ponder the obvious question: What does all this mean for jockeys of the Tin Sandwich? As always, it means we have the opportunity to improvise with whatever the marketplace might offer-up, since few mics are intentionally marketed with harmonica players as the key target. Armed with our search criteria of SOUND and WORKABILITY we can begin to sift through this vast landscape of Dynamic candidates, new and old, and gain some understanding as to which ones might serve as an apt delivery system for the gospel of Saint Harmonica. Among the top contenders would certainly be Ernie Seeler’s Shure Unidyne designs (the 545, SM57, and SM58 were case examples in our last outing) by virtue of their ruggedness and versatility. They’re also the best-known and most widely distributed family of mics in the field of sound reinforcement. BUT...Go a little farther off the main drag and you’ll find all sorts of surprises...

Consider this: There’s a reasonably clear relationship between the list price of a dynamic mic and the consistency of its response curve, particularly with regard to its upper frequency range. A quality dynamic for sound reinforcement will show a response curve of 50HZ to 15KHZ, maybe 16KHZ. Conversely, some of the lower order dynamics have less realistic but really interesting (and, for our purposes, useful) response characteristics. For instance, the Shure 533 Sphere-O-Dyne, bottom-feeder of their “ballmic” line, has a 40HZ to 11KHZ frequency range. The lowly Shure 561 “You want fries with that?” paging mic has a 40HZ to 10KHZ curve. Maybe LOW-FI for doing quality vocals, but for amplified harp, these numbers hold tremendous potential for HUMVEE-sized tone while suppressing the higher, more problematic frequencies. Useful tools...

There are plenty examples of this inverse bang-for-the-buck theory to be found: The first time I saw Mark Hummel he had an Electro-Voice 605 in his hands. The EV 605 tops-out at around 7,000CPS. James Cotton, playing the Fillmore West with a Shure 585 through a Fender Super Reverb. Even beyond the “legit” dynamic contenders, you’ll find Calrads, Rystals and Olsens that are worth experimenting with as well. Many of them are worthy of space in the fastlane...

The Misfit Grab Bag and meeting your match... 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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