



Microphone Choices Within the Choices...
“At The Harmonica Microphone Bench” with Fritz Hasenpusch, www.harmonicassessions.com

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Thus far we've established our motivational need: Find a way of getting Mr. Harmonica heard by the masses beyond acoustic earshot. We've determined that one of the crucial operative elements in the formula to achieve this, the “lens” through which the audio signal must pass, is Lord Microphone. But how to choose from among so many qualified candidates? You'd think it was another recall election... Believe me, it IS simpler than politics IF you take the time to recognize what the components are that add up to a more than just acceptable amplified sound and what aspects to look (and listen) for in a microphone that will up your chances of finding the electronic “voice” you seek.

Since we're focusing specifically on the microphone to be chosen for inclusion in this alchemic formula, let's assume that the quality of the other variable components (the actual harmonica, cable, and amplification) are all doing their respective jobs satisfactorily and appropriately (good quality playable harp, proper length of cable, correct impedance for amp's input, clean AC power, etc.). We'll be dealing with these all-important inner-related aspects of the formula in the future. Onward to the mics...

Let's create a descriptive profile of the principal candidates by utilizing the criteria outlined in last issue's column: “HAND-HELD”, SOUND, and WORKABILITY.

The words “HAND-HELD” are in quotation marks because of the simple fact that the great majority of vintage mic designs that have found service in the hands of harp players were NEVER DESIGNED TO BE HANDLED DIRECTLY (With the exception of the “squeeze to talk” mobile communications units, mics designed to be hand-held during performance usage would not surface until the late '50s).

Let's look at this earlier “Pre-Hand-Held” category... Microphone mobility developed along with the Art Deco mic designs themselves, and it was common for the inexpensive utility “Bullet” and “Biscuit” mics of the '30s and '40s to be packaged and sold with a wooden, plastic, or metal handle that often could be released from its desktop base, commonly by means of a rotational twist-lock. For our purposes, these mics shaped like La Salle headlamps offered the opportunity for improvised use beyond the designer's intentions, which were simply to sell the unit by means of a stylish package, much like the functionless fins on Detroit cars of the '50s were meant to catch the buyer's eye. Combine the fact that these elliptical mic designs COULD be held in the hands with their sheer numbers and availability meant that they were prime targets to be picked-up and abused by harp players seeking to be heard and willing to experiment.

A broadly inclusive list of microphones from the “Pre-Hand-Held” period that would fit this profile could include: The American Microphone Co.’s C7, RC “Biscuit”, D4 “Saltshaker”, and D7; The Astatic Corp.’s line of communications microphones, including the 30 “Biscuit”, the JT-30 family, T-3, DN, and 10C; The lower end of the Electro-Voice line (605, 620, etc.); the broad variety of Shure Bros. “Bullets”, including the 405 “Rocket”, the 7A, 707, 440, and the “Green”, “Brown”, “Blue”, and “Brushed Chrome” variations of their “Baby Bullets” and the 520 series; The Turner Co.’s BX and CX, 22, VT-73, BD and CD. Yes, there are hundreds of other examples. However, this list does help to illustrate the vast number of early mics that came off their stands and into our hands by virtue of their relative sizes and shapes. Some of these mics have found great favor in this purpose, becoming legendary icons themselves. Others, less so. We’ll take a look at their strengths and weaknesses within our SOUND and WORKABILITY criteria– and move into the realm of the modern Hand-Held microphone (no quotation marks necessary)- the next time we visit The Microphone Bench...

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