

Artistically Speaking

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Dear Soundman - What is in your mic drawer?

We've all thought about it at one time or another. If your house were on fire or a tornado was headed toward it or it was about to be flooded or whatever (you get the idea) and you only had the ability to save one thing, what would it be? I realize it's the kind of cheesy question they might ask a beauty queen during a pageant, but go along with me for the moment if you will.

Considering that my kids are all grown up and my wife still has the use of her arms and legs, after all they would be dragging out their own keepsakes, and somehow if that would relieve me from any moral dilemmas in my dash to save what I could, then I would definitely save my microphones. Food? No. I could stand to lose a few pounds. Water? No. I could collect rain water or something. Cash? Well I don't have any (hmmmm... guess I must have spent it all on microphones - sad, I know). Yes, I realize that tells maybe too much about me. But there, I've said it. Yep, absolutely my microphones.

Now don't jump to any extreme conclusions at this point. I don't go to Star Trek conventions dressed as a Borg. Yes, I have seen all of the TV episodes and movies including the crappy final season, but I couldn't even tell you any of the numbers of any of the Enterprises. I don't stay up at night wearing a tinfoil hat worrying that aliens are trying to read my mind. I'm not stark raving obsessed. Let's just say I hold my microphones to only the esteem and respect they deserve and nothing more. I might have bought a mic or two (or maybe even three) on Ebay, but I NEVER paid more than it was worth.

Now with that out of the way, let me get back to the question at hand. What is in my microphone drawer?

One might say I have a reasonably large collection to choose from and I am always experimenting, so the following list may vary from time to time. This is what I am taking out at the moment to do shows, demo's, and clinic's with - in other words, live audio. Also, this is my personal mic package so I'm not concerned what the neighbors might think. These are all about my personal choices. It's a collection that makes me happy. That said - on with the list.



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EV N/D 957 - re-issue

These I use for everything on my front line with very few exceptions. Vocals - Horns - Percussion - Harp - Acoustic Guitar - whatever show's up. Some are originals, some are re-issue's (not a bad copy as re-issues go). Wide frequency response - great mid definition - nice high end without being brittle or strident - handles high SPL without breakup - very directional - hot output - great monitor microphone. My previous front line workhorse mic was the EV PL80. Unfortunately they are no longer made. Mine finally wore out and can no longer be repaired. I still have one that I haven't let anyone but myself use. I guess you'll just have to take my word for it that it was a great mic - it was my favorite hand-held performer vocal mic, ever. Using matching mikes upfront helps simplify monitors and makes it easy to control any stray feedback in the mains without killing the system tuning. Since they are used for a whole wide range of sounds they have to be good and versatile.

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EV N/D 308 - retired

These I use for my back line chores. They are not made anymore but I still have enough set aside for the time being. They sound great, as all of the original EV N/DYM microphones did. They were my personal favorite over the more widely known N/D 408 which used the N/D 757 capsule (I still see a lot of these in riders). The 308's have simple cardioid patterns that worked much better up close without the excessive proximity effect of their more directional sibling and they have the added benefit of being flat on the front. The flat grill and unique swivel yoke are perfect for draping over guitar cabinets and eliminating stand clutter on stage while still being able to be positioned accurately.

2 **EV Blue Raven - new**
This, and the Cardinal below, are new to my collection. They were designed for EV by Blue. It's great to see Blue's involvement with the EV mic line. They have a real passion for microphones and that passion shows in the performance of these new mikes. These are not just some cheap Chinese knockoffs. They are the real deal. Among other things the Raven makes a great electric guitar amp microphone. It can turn a whiney screechy guitar sound (a bad guitar sound at 140 db off the stage is one of the soundman's worst enemy's) and help turn it into the big bad ass ballsy monster it's suppose to be. Now if it could only turn down the damn amp it would be perfect.

2 **EV Blue Cardinal - new**
This is the condenser cousin the Raven above. When your rock star needs to stand out from the posers, whip this mic out and become a hero. Just a little note to those blessed with PA's that have great HF drivers, watch out for the spike around 10k which is the first harmonic of the peak below it. It can give you a clean shave. Did I mention how great this microphone looks?

2 **EV RE-1000 - retired**
This is yet another example of a great microphone that was never given a chance to find it's home before it was retired. This is another specialty mic that I carry for those who whine about wanting AKG 414's. A studio true condenser super cardioid, and unlike the vaulted 414, which has many o.k. patterns but is master of none, the RE-1000 was designed to be a no compromise microphone. This microphone has one of the best off-axis's frequency balance I've ever heard. As you work around the mic only the level changes, not the voicing. Amazing studio sweetness without all of the unnecessary and distracting air. It was only in production for a few years before some tragic circumstance caused it's demise. This microphones only peer was it's big brother the EV RE 2000, also retired. Shame on you EV for letting so many great mikes slip from your fingers. The closest you will get to the sound of this mike is the next one in the list...

1 **EV RE 200 - current product**
This is the probe style version of the above microphone. There was a handheld performer version (RE 500) that is also retired.

1 **EV RE 27 - current product**
This replaced the EV RE 20 in my live audio package as soon as it came out. I've said for years that if I could only have one choice of microphone it would be the EV RE 20 and that is still true, but at least in the current climate of popular kick drum sounds, the extended frequency response and sensitivity gained from the use of a neodymium-alloy magnet made this my new kick drum microphone. It's Variable -D cardioid design effectively eliminates proximity effect so the bass response of the mic will not load up and stay tight and punchy just like the RE 20 but it also has the added energy at 4k to 6k so it is not necessary to do much on the channel strip to get it to perfection.

Caution - Rant Ahead

I know way too many self proclaimed sound experts who think that if God had not meant for them to turn all the knobs, all of the way, all the time, he would not have put them there in the first place. I very rarely use any channel EQ. I prefer to fix the sound at the source, using the right microphone and the right placement, instead of trying to compensate at the board or EQ or with a comp or gate. This is what makes the difference between a being soundman or being a bus driver (if I hear one more time that, "well, he knows all of our songs" crap I'm going to hit somebody. Please believe me, after over 35 years in the business, I know all of them too). We unfortunately are living in times of excess and where everybody is a sound expert. PLEASE keep all of the crap unplugged from the rig and concentrate on the mix. You don't use all the tools in your toolbox unless you need them. Quit trying to use a saw when you need a hammer. Just because it's there does not mean you have to use it.

OK - I feel better now - don't you? Where was I?

1 **EV N/D 168 - retired**
This little gem was only around for a short time. Basically they took an N/D 157 (an o.k. vocal mic) and put it in an indestructible little housing where it blossomed into the perfect little close-mic snare microphone. It has a great spike at 10K (snap), a nice little presence rise centered at 3K (crackle) and a nice proximity boost at 125 to 250 (pop). What more could you ask for? (A drummer who can actually tune his own drums maybe?) And then like all good microphones, it was retired. Find one on eBay if you can and throw that broken 57 in the trash.

2 **EV PL 95 Modified - retired**
This microphone had it beginnings as model DS 35. But some marketing genius at EV at the time

decided that if they painted it a different color and gave it a different number maybe the guy at the music store wouldn't know that the guy at the gas station next door was selling the same microphone for less. If the model number was different the music store guy could actually sell it for a profit and everybody could live together in peace. Seriously though I swear that the beige one sounded better. It had to be the paint effecting the phase response or something technical like that. At any rate, the ensuing confusion helped kill another great microphone. It was designed as a vocal microphone for on-stage performers that worked a runway and spent a lot of time in front of the speaker system. This necessitated a design that was directional with a wide linear response at all angles so that this well behaved mic could produce extremely high gain before feedback. I discovered that those same characteristics made it the perfect tom mic. A great close mike with good separation in close quarters that could keep my gates locked up in the truck for when I might really need them. A good friend of mine, Mike Torlone, who worked for EV at the time, gave a pair of my precious jewels to a microphone engineer at EV (who must have also had an affection for great microphones) who lovingly shortened the long handle down to a manageable tom mounting length. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! And no, they are not for sale.

1 Sennheiser MD 409 - retired

Yet another microphone that did not achieve cult status until it was discontinued, this time by Sennheiser. I don't remember it being very expensive but I thought it sounded great on toms, conga, timbales and tympani. I also thought it was great on electric bass, either alone or in conjunction with a DI. And as does the N/D 308, it drapes on a bass cabinet without a stand. It was a nice compliment to live bass by accentuating the higher frequencies while not adding muddiness to the low end. Steve Graham, our resident studio guru, swears by them as an indispensable electric guitar mic. Sennheiser re-issued a neodymium version as the model e609 a couple of years ago. It's a different animal though, not bad, just different.

3 Earthworks SR 25 - NEW

These microphones are the new darlings of my collection. Allot can be said about these microphones, and at some point in the near future I will dedicate an entire paper on them, but for now let me just go over a few highlights. Let me start out by saying that these microphones stand in stark contrast to every other microphone I own. Every other mic has it's unique sound and physical attributes and deciding on which one to use is like (this is a great Earthworks analogy) an artist choosing the right brush, color, and technique. The Earthworks mikes are more like cloning a copy of the original only bigger.

I had been using one their reference microphones for sometime to make audio measurements (an exacting science). When I went to order a new model for my Smaart Live system last summer I was introduced to a drum kit set they were offering. What caught my attention was it was a three mic set. I have been doing three mic drum sets live for many years but I had never seen anyone else do it. The norm is to use about a million different microphones all over the kit, hook up a zillion gates and compressors and then spend the next two or three days trying to make the confusion of gear and sound work together. By the time you finish impressing all of the onlookers with your superior knob tweaking skills, you don't have any time left in the day to eat much less bother with any other instruments, much less vocals. What you end up with at best is an OK drum sound with little else.

Caution Again - Personal Rant

Real Soundmen spend 50% of their time voicing the system, 49% of their time on their lead artists sound (vocals first) and then the remaining 1% on the rest of the band or a cold drink or a nap before show time.

A couple of strategically placed microphones on the top side of the kit and one dedicated to the kick and maybe even a touch of a good stereo compressor for the top microphones to help balance an undisciplined drummer. What you end up with is a great solid drum sound without all of the phasey, comb filtered mess not to mention the time savings between acts. So when when I saw the Earthworks Live Drum set I didn't even ask how much, just how soon can they be delivered and I haven't look back. These are not, like I mentioned earlier, just any old paintbrush. What you get from these microphones is whatever you point them at, only louder. The sound can best be described as transparent (warning - you might have to help the drummer tune his kit and tighten up his hardware). Gone is all of that annoying hissy cymbal crap, all of that over processed comb filtered drum stuff and a kick drum sound that is not battling for acoustic space with the bass guitar. As a bonus you get all of this without all of those screaming guitar amps bleeding into all of those open drum mic channels.

And if all of the preceding weren't enough to send you running to buy a set (disclaimer - Careysound does sell Earthwork microphones) these microphones aren't just great for drums. I just read an

article the other day bemoaning the fact that we now have a whole generation of new music fans that have never heard the sound of a real acoustic instrument. Well I've got some more bad news for you, when history repeats itself, as it is known to do from time to time, there will be no more soundmen left that know how to amplify them either. In short, these microphones are the answer to a soundmans prayer for making any real acoustic instrument louder for live audio. These are just a few of the artists that I blew away in the last year with these microphones. - James Cotton Blues Band, Afro-Cuban Big Band, True Love Waits: The Music of Radiohead, Christopher O'Riley, Nashville Underground, Eric Silver, Andrea Zonn, Los Straitjackets & the World Famous Pontani Sisters Summer, Darol Anger & the Republic of Strings, John Jorgenson Quintet, The Waybacks, Steep Canyon Rangers, Rolando Morales-Matos, Bela Fleck's Acoustic Trio, Matt Haimovitz, and Chris Rice. I said at the beginning that this would cover just the highlights so I won't go into all of the technical descriptions of how they do what they do - so enough already.

Bottom line - this is a must have addition to any mic collection.

6 Klark-Teknik DN 100 - NEW

And finally, no mic package would be complete without a great active direct-injection box (DI) and there is no better or cost effective choice than the new KT DN 100. Period!

Now go out and start your own collection and learn your craft so I can call you a real Soundman too!