



The New Classic - an Oxymoron?

March 1999 by Joe Chiccarelli

In the 20 years I've been in the record business, there's one thing I thought I would never see improvements upon: the microphones. Like great guitars, most of the really fine ones were made in the 50's and 60's. Also just like great guitars, a classic mic is always a classic. However, I've wondered if there may be some room for innovation or improvement if not necessarily a new model that could become an everyday tool. In recent years my choices of mics for tracking would include classics like the Neumann U47,U67,SM57 , AKG C12, and Sennheiser 421. But some of the newer (soon to be classics) like the AT 4060 and AKG D112 have become everyday mics I rely upon. Recently, though, I've come across a new mic to add to the collection.

On a recent tracking date for Epic/Sony artists "Hummingbird" at Nashville's Starstruck Studios, I was stumped for just the right acoustic guitar sound. The song was a driving, jangly acoustic guitar-based rock track. The sounds of the acoustics were the meat of the track and they needed lots of bottom but without sacrificing clarity. Mic choice for Mike Nobles' vintage Martin was a C12, and it worked perfectly. My choice for Mike Spriggs' jumbo Taylor guitar was a Telefunken 251E, placed where the neck meets the sound hole. This setup usually supplies a clear bright top and a full bottom. The guitar was also miked with a Neumann KM 184, placed further up the neck and aiming down towards the sound hole. This usually gives me lots of jangly top which I can blend in with the 251.

However, after trying several placements I was unhappy with the 251; I could not get the clarity in the midrange I was looking for. The hammerons and melodic fills that were being played inside the chords seemed blurry and unclear. Mike Spriggs suggested trying another guitar or a different voicing approach but we ended up back with the Taylor, which is a very full frequency spectrum guitar. Searching for a mic with more pronounced and open midrange, my next choice was the new TLM 103. This turned out to be just right. Very defined midrange - I could really hear the part now - and a nice smooth top end. I added just a touch of low end boost and blended in the KM 184 , for the jangle factor, and there was my guitar sound. An added plus was having a different character of microphone from the C12 on the other acoustic, which gave me greater separation in the sound of the two guitars. The mic worked out so well it was also used later for additional overdubs such as on a twelve string solo and a "Nashville tuned" high string part. We also used it on a Hammond B-3 organ.

On other recent tracking dates I've started using the TLM 103 in my standard electric guitar setup, which is a close miked SM57, a room AT 4050 and mid placed U 87. This has become a good option for the U 87, it has a similar type of color but takes much more level before compressing. Well, perhaps I've been wrong about classics; I found that with some of the new technologies available even companies that have been around for generations can turn out a new classic at any time.

