

MICROPHONES

JD BRILL

BY DANIEL KELLER

TALK TO A LOT of live sound engineers and you'll collect a wealth of tips on making the mix sound good. Tales of indispensable tube compressors, must-have microphones, and a hundred different anecdotes on "what I did with so-and-so" are the front-of-house mixer's stock in trade, and to be sure, most of it's pretty good stuff.

The interesting thing about talking to veteran mixer JD Brill is that his stories contain little by way of gear-mania. Sure, with a legacy of driving the faders for everyone from The Eagles to Spinal Tap, JD has no shortage of stories to tell, and at a recent dinner we were all laughing so hard I'm sure the waiters wished they'd seated us at the back, if at all. But ask JD to tell you about what he does to get such a well-defined mix, and his response is typically something along the lines of "Well, having good source material makes it a whole lot easier." Even pressed to elaborate, he'll tell you it's mostly a matter of good mic placement and putting it all in the right perspective.

Watching JD work is both inspiring and frustrating. Inspiring, because he maintains a peaceful, Buddha-like countenance even in a stadium surrounded by 20,000 crazed fans. Frustrating, because mixing seems to come so naturally to him that it's almost impossible to glean any of his wisdom—like watching any master, he makes it look deceptively easy.

JD tends toward Shure mics for most of his backline stage setup. "They're consistent and dependable. When everything else around you is changing from night to night, it's good to work with a standard you can count on."

For The Eagles' recent *Farewell I* tour, JD leaned heavily on the Shure KSM32 condenser. "I've used them for years on overheads and



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Veteran mixer and front-of-house engineer JD Brill works for renowned touring company Soundworx/Clair Brothers in California. He has worked the boards for artists as diverse as Spinal Tap and Bette Midler, and is currently accompanying The Eagles on one of their "Farewell" tours.

percussion. This time we put a bunch on the horns, too, and a pair on the piano." He also uses an assortment of primarily Shure mics for drums, including a combination of Beta52 and SM91 on kick, Beta98 on toms, and the ubiquitous SM57 on snare. Percussion normally gets miked with an SM81, KSM137 or KSM141. He's also a fan of the stereo VP88 for larger percussion rigs.

As you might imagine, vocals are a bit more of a variable, though JD seems to favor Shure mics here as well, with his first choice

being the Beta 87C condenser capsule on Shure's U4D wireless systems. "I used those on Spinal Tap. It's got a nice tight pattern, which is helpful on a busy stage when there's lots going on.

"I tend to ride the vocal channels in any case, so on The Eagles, for example, I use the SM86 instead, because those guys move around quite a bit, and since the 86 has a more open pattern, it still gives me a full sound even when they're a bit off-axis." On the Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh solo tours, he also used the SM86. For Bette Midler's recent *Kiss My Brass* tour, JD again chose the Beta87C, along with a SM54 headset mic for the more dance-oriented numbers.

JD tends to use very little processing on the live mix. "The speaker rigs we take out are mostly Clair I-4 curved array systems, and I've got a rack of your typical reverbs—usually a Lexicon PCM90 and Yamaha SPX900 or SPX1000. I typically have several channels of dbx160 compressors for the backline. Vocal compression will be different depending on the artist, but it's rarely anything too exotic—maybe Avalon or TubeTech."

For the most part JD's methodology is pretty simple. "People aren't paying to hear a microphone or a piece of gear. It's all about the music and the musicians, and they want to hear that song, or vocal line, or guitar lick that they identify with. My job is to make it sound like they remember it, and like they expect it to sound.

"If I'm mixing a legend like The Eagles, my job isn't to improve on 'Hotel California.' My job is to deliver exactly what the band is playing. I'm there to make it sound exactly like it sounds, and if I've done that, I've done my job." ■

M-AUDIO SOLARIS

MULTI-PATTERN CONDENSER MICROPHONE SPOTLIGHT

BY CLIVE GREGSON

BACK IN 1980 when my band signed our first real record deal, we decided to make our first "proper" album in the local studio where we had recorded our demos. Figuring that we'd now demand "proper" microphones, the studio took out a sizable loan and purchased two Neumann U 87s. Nowadays they could probably buy a couple dozen large-diaphragm condenser mics for the same amount, be spoilt for choice and feel reasonably assured that they were not compromising on quality.

The M-Audio Solaris is one such modern



example. It comes with a solid carrying case, sturdy shock mount and my kind of user guide: only four pages! The mic is described therein as "lollipop style"—a large and very solid lollipop, mind you. It features a 10dB pad, bass cut switch and a choice of three polar patterns: cardioid, omni and figure of eight. It requires phantom power.

Simplicity itself to set up and use, the Solaris sounded impressive from the start: very smooth, open, detailed and versatile. I was particularly taken

with the clear, even tone it imparted to acoustic guitar and the way it reproduced vocals without any unpleasant coloration.

IN A NUTSHELL: It's hard to imagine many applications where the Solaris wouldn't be highly serviceable. All three polar patterns worked very well; the figure of eight is an especially good feature that's not frequently found on mics in this price range. This is the first M-Audio product that I've used. I'm sure it won't be the last!

STREET PRICE: about \$300.