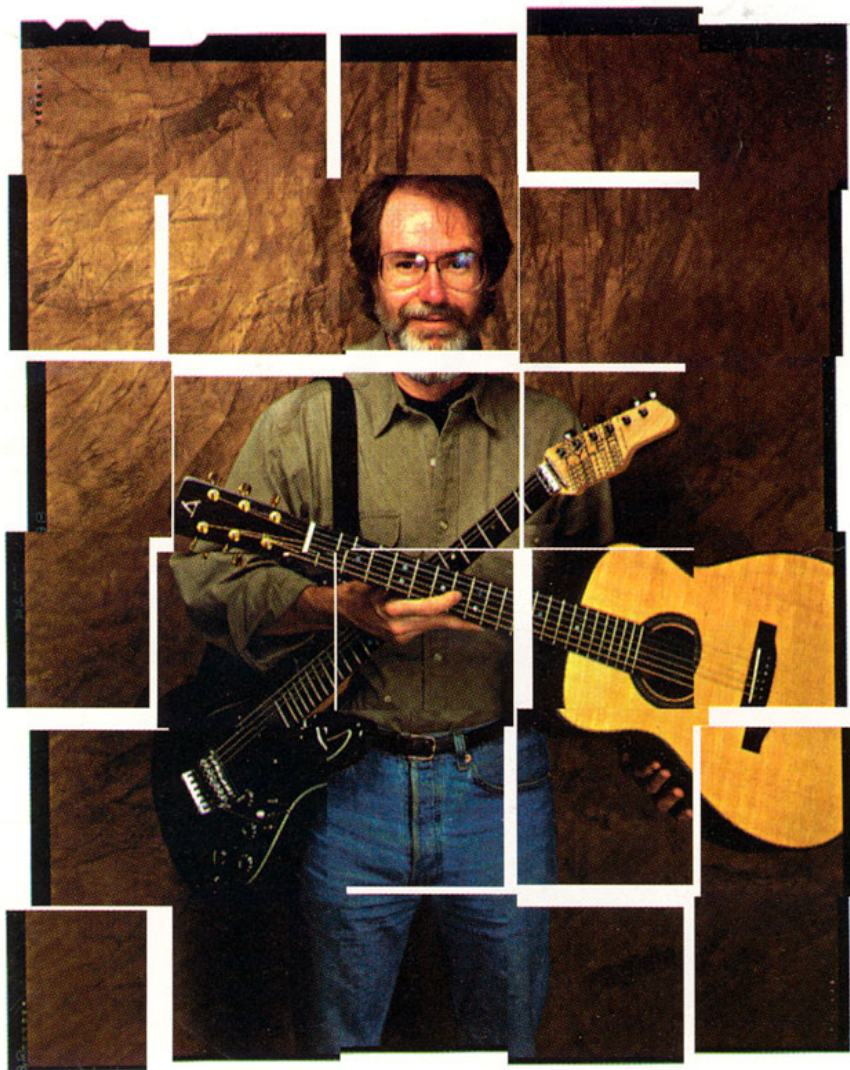


Dean Parks Serious Sessions

This veteran L.A. session guitarist has spent enough time in the studio to have come up with some ideas worth passing along.



Interview by Nicholas Kirgo

on—ever since I heard there *was* such a profession, where guys could actually live in one place and get paid the best of any musicians, play an endless variety of music with all the best players and get to hear it back on a hi-fi system.

H&SR: As a producer, what's your ideal recording gear?

DP: When I'm producing, I become the subjective guy about how things should sound. I think that as a producer you should let go of your technical preferences to a degree and let the engineer have all of his preferences. If you're smart, you should try to talk in subjective terms. Of course, I say that, and I'll end up asking him to take away a narrow band of 3kHz if something's hitting me as too harsh in the phones. I do know all the frequencies and what their effect is, at least to give him an idea of where to start.

If he's an SSL guy, that's cool. I like some things about the SSL console. It's not the most open hi-fi sound you're going to hear, but it's got that great overall compression. I've heard good music on those things. I've heard good music on the older Neve's.

I'm not sure, in this day and age, that it's so important what a console is. The engineer Eric Prestige and I did some flat mixes with no EQ at various mix studios around town, and what we found were huge differences from studio to studio. The sound of the multitrack machines and the console... A track that's somewhat harsh may sound better if it's mixed on a Neve. A Harrison console would be the worst thing to mix something like that on. If it had been something that started out kind of mushy, we may have *wanted* the Harrison to add some sparkle.

H&SR: Do you prefer to get the initial sound of an instrument to tape without EQ?

Texas-born guitarist Dean Parks has managed the neat trick of remaining a first call session musician on the L.A. scene for nearly twenty years, nesting a place for himself in the face of everything from syndrums to samplers. Arriving here in the early '70s, Parks came to the attention of session ace Larry Carlton, who began to refer him to a wide variety of artists and contractors. Since then, Parks has contributed to everything from Stevie Wonder's *Inner Visions*, Steely Dan's *Aja*, sessions with Paul Simon, countless commercials and film soundtracks, dozens of vintage '70s and '80s Motown sides, right

on up to recent hits with Aaron Neville, Linda Ronstadt and Lyle Lovett. He's also produced sides for Dolly Parton, Gordon Lightfoot, Gary Wright and Steven Bishop. As a player, Dean Parks has come to exemplify the qualities of dependability, precision and intuition required of a studio musician. Parks met with us at Village Recorders in West Los Angeles, where he had just finished a commercial date with composers Liz Meyers and John Trivers (featured in *H&SR* December '91).

H&SR: Was being a studio musician always a focus for you?

DP: It was my focus from really early

DP: Well that's my goal as a session guitarist, and in fact most engineers say that they don't have to do anything to my sound except bring up the two faders. There's equipment now to get your guitar rig to do that. But as far as drums go, no EQ? Absolutely not! If you have a miking configuration that's worked for you and it's coming to your speakers and it sounds like shit, you have to tweak it 'til it doesn't. I don't think there's anything sacred about flat. Flat is just another EQ curve to me. I think it's nice to get the general characteristic by mic selection. Boy, if you want to hear the difference between mics, put 'em in front of an overdrive guitar.

H&SR: Do you have a mic preference?

DP: The [Shure] SM57 is by far the best. Always works, for all kinds of electric guitar sounds. I like it very close to the speaker. I don't like distant miking. I'd rather get distance with effects. Also, it's very important where you put the mic on the speaker with EV's. The center of the speaker is so harsh a peak, the mic has to be off to the side. With Celestions, I'm not nearly so picky. The mic can be right in the middle.

H&SR: How about getting an acoustic guitar sound?

DP: I look for a guitar that's a little too bright, with not very much lows for recording, because the mic, with its proximity effect, is going to give you more than you need, anyway. You can't use a guitar that's not bright enough and expect it to record well. I like the Neumann KM54 tube mic for recording acoustic guitar, and the Neumann M49 is nice for sweeter melody things. I like some crowding in an acoustic sound, when it sounds like an amp just below distortion, and I like compression.

Miking live instruments is a challenge. Sometimes it's nice in miking not to get the fullest sound, but rather the most focused sound. If you think that, say, in a bluegrass band, the job of the rhythm guitar is to provide a midrange snare-type frequency, maybe just EQ it so it does *that* really well and not worry so much about the extreme highs. Think of each instrument as having a characteristic and exaggerate that characteristic. It might not sound that great when they're solo'd, but when they're all together it sounds fantastic because no one is in anyone else's territory.

Engineers are always making that choice between how separate and pristine each instrument is and how melded and confused they are. I'm a big fan of confusion in a mix. If something comes across as a bunch of individual instruments, I'm not liking it.

H&SR: What kind of guitars are you using?

DP: I've got two Strat shaped guitars, a Kramer and a James Tyler. The Tyler has two humbucking pickups and the Kramer has EMGs. For acoustics, I'm using a guitar made by James Dragge of Sebastopol, California. He's made guitars for Rickie Lee Jones. I absolutely love the guitar he made for me. I also have a Santa Cruz acoustic that I like.

H&SR: Amplifiers?

DP: I'm using a Marshall Silver Jubilee for the heavy guitar stuff. I think it might even be solid-state distortion, so it *shouldn't* sound good, but it does. I'm also using a Boogie Studio preamp and a Mosvalve power amp—it has a really pleasing quality, what you'd think tubes should sound like.

H&SR: What are you using for effects?

DP: I've got an old [Delta Labs] Effector delay that I still use, which I've modified with a Curtis filter so I can knock off the highs that way I like. I use it for long delays. I have a Yamaha SPX900 that I use for ping-ponging and bizarre pitch-change effects. I've got a [Yamaha] Rev 7, of all things, that I use for a little reverse slap. I've got a Rocktron compressor, a Rane EQ that I use for the clear sound, and a T.C. EQ for the overdrive sound. I don't use reverb—engineers are offended by it and it makes punch-ins difficult. Also, it just doesn't sound that great coming out of guitar speakers. I've got Rocktron Hush units after each preamp stage. I don't believe in putting a Hush after delays because it pollutes the sound quality. All my effects are switched with a Bob Bradshaw switching system.

H&SR: Just to finish up, do you feel, as a studio musician, there's a dichotomy between being a craftsman and an artist?

DP: Well, you know, a craftsman can craft a part even if he doesn't care if it's great or not. I'll put it this way, when I play fingerpicking or rhythm acoustic, it's my style. I can tell that it's me, and I have a certain set of ideals that I like. I'm defined as an individual. When I play a solo, it's the same thing. I feel that I have a personality and it's a human being playing, not just some hacked out part. I think that's artistry. When it's like breathing and comes out as a stroke of your pen—there you have it. You could do plenty of the jobs I do without putting art into it, but that's just no fun. ♣

Guitarist Nicholas Kirgo played with Animal Logic (featuring Stewart Copeland & Stanley Clarke) and can be heard with Bloc on their album, 'In the Free Zone' (A&M Records), and with his own band, The Twains.