

Big Ol' Guitar



You play them. You record them. Some of you even like them. We're talking about guitars. And if you record music, then sooner or later (probably sooner) you're going to be faced with a six-string slinging performer who is looking to you to get his or her sound right. To help you

Special



out, this special section offers tips and techniques from some of the best guitar handlers in the business. Plus, just for good measure, we've thrown in a couple of guitar-related product reviews. So tune up, noodle around a little bit, send the drummer out of the room, and dive in...



PLAY-ROOM: Jerden's studio is geared up to handle his unique guitar recording techniques.

overdubs. When I am doing the basic track, I am not sure if it is going to be a keeper, so I will isolate the bass and guitar amps from the drum room. But when I actually do guitar overdubs, we pull all of the guitar cabinets (the heads always stay in the control room) out in the main room and then I have the option of using room mics on them, too.

When you mic the front and back of an open-back amp are you generally using a '57 in front and a '57 in back?

It can be a '57 or sometimes I use '421's. Sometimes it's a '57 on the front and a '421 on the back. It varies.

Do you find that you have phasing problems?

You always have to flip the phase on the rear mic. The amps that I normally mic front and back are the Vox amps and the

Fender amps. I don't rear-mic Marshall amps that often.

There tend to be more open-back Vox and Fender amps than Marshalls.

Exactly. And when you back-mic a Vox or Fender, you definitely get a good hump at around 150 cycles. When you pull up the rear mic and flip the phase switch (which actually puts it in phase), all of a sudden there's a 150-cycle bump that comes up, which is a good frequency for guitar.

How do you handle all those tracks in the mix?

It's really not that difficult. One thing that I haven't explained is that I cut them all flat and then EQ in the mix. On SSL consoles, including the one in my studio, there are bandpass filters so I can (for instance) cut all the high end out of

the Vox amp that is being used for the low end of the guitar. Also, if you go in totally flat, they just won't have any punch.

Generally what I am doing on the low amp — let's say the Vox amp — is looking for fundamental frequencies of 100 up to, like, 300 cycles. But the Vox amp also has a great "squak" quality, as I call it. I may accentuate that "squak" quality at 600 to 1000 cycles. Then I'll low-pass from about 1000 cycles on up. From 1000 cycles on down is where all of my desirable frequencies are that I want from the Vox. On the main amp, the mid amp — which could be a Marshall or Mesa-Boogie — anything goes as far as EQ. I let that one scream. On the amp that is used just for the high end, I'll high pass and cut out all the stuff below, let's say, 1000 cycles — just use the top end stuff. But when you are

doing that you have to be careful. Usually I high-pass and low-pass filter the high one, because brightening it gives a lot of frizzle on top. Then I'll cut that frizzle off at about 12 kHz. So on the high amp you've got from 12 kHz down to about 1000 or even 3000 cycles. In the mix, the middle amp is featured and I feed the other ones into it.

By mixing the low and the high amps in, you are actually modifying the tone of what the middle amp is producing.

Yes. I pull the low and high amps completely out and start by getting a mix with the drums and bass and rhythm guitars with the middle amp. I pull up my rhythm guitars left and right and get the mix to sound OK. Then I slide in those other guitars to see how they sound. As I go through the process, I may be modifying the frequencies and the points where I am band-passing. If it is done correctly, you

can get a lot of power out of it. If it is done incorrectly, you get mud and the guitars can be too big.

Then you lose the vocal and the drums. Right, and start the cycle of trying to bring faders up to hear it.

Will you pan those three tracks to the same location?

Yes, as they were recorded. On the first pass of rhythm guitar, those three amps go down in one pass and get panned to the left. Then on the next pass I'll have the guitar player double the part and those three will be panned hard right. They are always hard left/hard right, and they stay in the position that they were recorded.

Do you find that there's a particular spot that you go for when placing the '57?

Usually it ends up about halfway between the middle of the speaker and the edge of the cone. If you go towards the outside of the cone you get a little bit more distortion; if you go to the inside it gets a little sweeter. There's not a whole lot of voodoo to it. The way we point the mic is at 45 degrees instead of going in at a 90-degree angle. The side ports on the '57 create the cardioid pattern, but when you put that mic on a loud sound source like a Marshall at 120 dB SPL, the capsule tends to collapse a little. That side-port stuff almost acts as compression, which gives it a nice, tight sound. That's the reason I go in at an angle.

Since you are not recording the microphones with any EQ, do you tend to use outboard mic pres or console mic pres? We use Summit mic pres that have been specially built. Actually, Rupert Neve himself assembled these things, and they're amazing. They belong to Brian, and he has a rack of 24, plus there's another 24 Summits in our studio. All of my recording is done with tube preamps and tube compressors, all as straight-line as possible into the tape machine, bypassing the board. I use the board just for monitoring purposes.

How much compression do you use when cutting guitar tracks?

The ratio is usually about 4:1, and I am pulling it maybe 6 dB or so. Not a whole lot, but not a little either.

What about bass?

I also record bass with multiple amps and multiple DIs. I usually start off with an SVT cabinet with a '57 on one of the cones. We go through the speakers to find the best sounding speaker in the cabinet.

Do you find it varies a lot?

Sometimes there's a big difference, but sometimes there's no difference. I always listen to every speaker to make sure we're on the right one, and at the right part of the speaker, too. I use an SVT, a Mesa Boogie, and an old Vox Westminster bass amp. It's a solid-state amp, and it has an 18-inch speaker with a separate head and a thing called "Tone X," which is supposed to be an EQ, but it's got this kind of punchy squak.

If you listen to oldies stations on AM radio, you can always hear the bass, and it sounds great. I listen to records today



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and I cannot hear what the bass player is playing. I spend great time mixing at low levels to make sure that the actual bass notes are heard. Using this Vox amp with the 18-inch speaker has really helped that. Of course, I want the lows and highs, but what I am fighting for is the mids because when you are recording aggressive stuff like The Offspring or Biohazard with that three-amp guitar setup, you have a lot of sound there. The bass has to compete with that. So I use that Vox amp, an SVT, and then I'll use a SansAmp Bass DI and an Ibanez TS-8 Tube Screamer. [The Ibanez Tube Screamer was originally intended for guitar. —Ed.]

Do you record these elements onto separate tracks?

It always ends up on two tracks. All amps go to one track and all of the direct

signals go onto the other. Usually they are used equally.

Do you tend to keep the recording path for bass similar with the Summit pres?

Yes. Everything is pretty much the same. As much tube as possible. If you are going for a Marshall sound, you are not going to get it with transistors. But, on the other hand, if you are looking for a really crazy sound...I have a Hamer 12-string bass that is really difficult to record because there's so many overtones from the different string gauges. I first ran into the Hamer 12-string bass was when I worked with Tom Peterson from Cheap Trick. He was using Marshalls and Hi-watts and said, "My hero is John Entwistle and the sound I am going for is like the sound of a piano being struck." Later on I bought a Hamer 12-string bass for myself and I always remember what

he said about a piano being struck. So what I came up with was to use two solid-state Vox Super Beatle amps that were made in the 1960s. They have four 12-inch speakers, two PA-style horns in each cabinet and are louder than hell. They are real brittle-sounding on guitar, but for the Hamer 12-string bass, it's the sound — like a piano being struck. I use two of those, so I have eight 12's and four horns. To split the signal between them I've been using an old Roland Chorus, modified by Rivera. It kind of shifts back and forth slowly between the two amps and it sounds like the end of the world. It's amazing. I used that in "Rooster" from Alice In Chains' *Dirt*. All of the choruses on "Rooster" are doubled — just the basic notes of the chord changes in the choruses. It's not that the whole bass part is doubled. If his part was playing a run in between the changes, he didn't double that — only the root notes of the chord changes. It gives a great sound.

Whereas his original bass part was played on a 4-string.

Yes, and that's still there, up front. The Hamer is mixed in with the guitars to add power. On top of that I have a Dan Electro 6-string piccolo bass. I use that through a Zoom processor set to a Marshall sound. The reason I use the Zoom as opposed to plugging the bass directly into a Marshall is that if you plug a 6-string bass into a Marshall, the sound is so huge it'll wash everything else out and kill the guitars. But the Zoom has a really limited bandwidth and it has the distortion. I use a similar technique with the 6-string, but instead of having the bass player just play the root notes like with the Hamer, he can actually double his bass part in certain sections with the Dan Electro because the sound isn't so massive that it will wash out his original bass line.

Do you compress the direct element of the bass sound as well?

Yes, always with the Summit compressors. Again with a ratio of about 4:1 and about 6 dB of compression. Sometimes we compress all the DIs together and sometimes we compress them separately. I make so many records and I try to make each sound unique for the band. It's not like I have my studio wired a certain way and they just come here and everything is epoxy'd in place to plug into the sound of my last record. It will vary.

It's not a cookie-cutter approach.
No, it's not at all.

EQ

