

## Stereoplay 03/04



### A Small Eavesdropper

*Whether it is out of avarice, sentimentality or a friendly turn, it has never been so easy to make inconspicuous recordings. Here are some practical and legal tips for private sound engineers.*

If a good fairy ever offered you an excursion in a time machine, where would you travel? Our advice is to try checking out the Beatles at the Hamburger Star Club at the beginning of the 60s. Or even better, why not go to the Liverpool Star Club. However, make sure you take a few little things along with you – a tiny recorder and microphone. A really good kit can be obtained for under 600 Euros. And when you return to 2004, you are likely to be a powerful person.

### The Curse of the Small

How amusing that what is found in the not so legal realm of recording technology today, is actually obtainable within less time. Yet, the fairy with the time machine does not want to be condescending. The moral of the story is that what is recorded today, is what yields fame and fortune tomorrow. During the 50s and 60s, the ancestors of present day tone hunters would have clamored for the technology that is currently available in every good media outlet.

The Beatles, Furtwängler, the young Callas... these days, when we hear a grandiose piece of music plagued by hissing and rumbling, we lament like conditioned Pavlov dogs. We think that it is unfortunate, sad and such a shame that the recording technology back then was not any better. Yet this is a fallacy. Even if we go back 60 years, there were excellent microphones being used in conjunction with ribbon machines. However, with this podgy equipment it was almost impossible to inconspicuously loaf about in the eighth row. Today's miniaturisation of technology provides the blessing of enabling one take equipment along and sneak it into places. According to an expert from the International Federation of the Photographic Industry (IFPR), this may be akin to thievery. However on the other hand, there is every reason, particularly along private grounds, where one may not only be allowed to make a recording, but may also be cordially asked to do so.

Before microphones, kidneys, maces, eights, globes are taken into consideration, the recording medium must be correct. Three practical accompaniments are possible. Compact band machines, DAT-Portis, and MiniDisk-Recorders. As most

often is the case, a question of finances arises. Clearly, the most expensive solution ends with the identification code SN.

Around 1960, the Swiss engineer, Stefan Kudelski designed a miniature recorder, the nagra Serie Noire. This technology however was destined for one address only – the United States Army. James Bond would have also been delighted with it, had he not been tied up in the service of Her Majesty. The ultimate 007 feeling is still obtainable today and available for everyone. However, you still have to muster up around 10 000 Euros, which is what the great grandchild of the SN, the nagra SNST R costs. In terms of size and form, its spool tone band machine has a similar structure to a Palm-Computer. Fitting within the surface area of a hand, it is as thick and large as a lean a pocket book. A professional's companion, it is still used today for recording dialogues in movies by being attached to an actors body, or similarly to the waste band of spies. Aged Nagra engineers still reminisce about the wonderful days of the iron curtain and undercover operations.

Whoever is looking for more value should get hold of a MiniDisc-Porti. The days of transportable compact cassette recorders are gone. Another item that is approaching its used by date is the DAT backup. The final series of the Tascam DA P1, which is the last representative of the DAT portable recorders, is being laid to rest this year, following the supplier's decision to discontinue production of the devices. Another up to date alternative would be hard disc recorders, for which manufacturers still have not found sound hunter clientel, as proven by poor inputs and course modulation possibilities.

### Aggravation with Power Supply

If one is to take price alternatives into consideration, the throne presently belongs to the portable MiniDisc. However, if you plan to get a hold of one, you should direct your attention to the fine print, since not every person that has a knack for recording is able to properly operate microphones. In the worst case scenario, the bottom most LCD beam of the level indicator may jerk, with a remote signal on the MD mumbling. There are two reasons why this may occur. The input sensitivity is set too high, or the 3.5 millimetre bushing does not support the supply of electricity to the microphone, since most condenser microphones are energy parasites of recording devices. In practice, the most expensive portable is not always the best companion. The miniaturization of the top models will be streamlined, with the manual control being a test of nerves. It is individual touches in the specialized trade that helps further. In other words, doing what provides greater dexterity during moments of darkness and tension.

Something to be aware of is that stereoplay is often disproportionately pushed by sellers. Does this portable come with a microphone input? Indeed it does, a glossed over piece

of information that would have ruined the Beatles trip. Another trap with Sony is that it provides a mike with a large label saying "for MD!", with a small detail in its instructions saying that a coin cell will be required to supply the operating voltage. But quite annoyingly, a coin cell is not enclosed.

### Two Ears with Latches

A contrasting example is Bayerdynamic, which anticipates all practice problems in advance and supplies professional microphones as a solution. Our favourite is the MCE 72. It is a classical 'in the hand' microphone that is built quite compact, while being robust and practical. It is energised with a customary 1.5 volt Mignon Battery that is bolted onto the microphone holder and (goodbye to the competition) even attaches. Another argument for its practicality is that the established XLR connector used by professionals can be exchanged at Bayerdynamic without the requirement of extensive adaptations. This is done by using a cable with mini bolts.

The aligned Stereo-Aura sounds credible, dynamically enthralling, tonally neutral and concentrated. Two condenser capsules on the inside of the microphone lie on the coupling that is provided. Every canal is covered with kidney characteristics at an angle of 60 degrees. Power stands at a total of 120 grand. When for example the Stereo-Aura is at a frontal alignment with the opera stage, it eliminates almost all distorting field sounds - the sneeze of a neighbour to the right, the rustling of the bon bon paper in the back row, and so on. It is our top recommendation if it is possible to have an apparatus that is slightly heavier (it weighs 175g).

It gets even smaller and more fascinating. The Soundman is an 'original head microphone'. (an interesting neologism). You would be correct to assume that this is a Neumann microphone, however there are two differences that distinguish the Soundman from other Neumann microphones – its price and its appearance. A Neumann microphone costs around 7000 euros (Neumann KU 100) and in a concert hall, it would be quite a conspicuous companion. The Soundman on the other hand costs between 130 and 230 Euros. The 'Original' is placed on a person's head, with the ears functioning as the microphone holders. This set up can be better grasped by imagining a concert goer, who pulls out the headphones of her walkman, not to listen to an alternative program, but rather, to make a Neumann microphone recording with two sphere characteristic microphones.

The result leaves one breathless, and provides a more expedient use of the headphone. When a recording is heard through 2 stereo speakers, it leaves one with the 'I am there' feeling. The diverse list of Soundman customers spans from the BBC to Daimler-Chrysler. Soundman offers its own versions of microcapsules according to what type of operation

and acoustic pressure is required. The top model is the OKM II Studio. The computer combines an ideal pair with only 0.5 decibels of deviation between the left and right channel. The manufacturer's homepage ([www.soundman.de](http://www.soundman.de)) provides some personal highlights of the 'Original Heads', ranging from the string quartet to the Corpus Christi procession.

A topic of discussion related to the product recently came to a head during some internet forums. Many asked, 'given that the microphone is placed in the ear, won't a person's pulse also enter the recording?' Soundman responded by saying, 'No, since the microphone capsules are freely suspended and have no direct contact with the ear'. The small eavesdropper leaves no traces.

Andreas Günther