



The Late Show with David Letterman

September 1998 by Michael Delugg

Neumann microphones at the Ed Sullivan Theater I'm one of those engineers that learned my craft before there were equalizers on every channel of the console. When I was working with Phil Ramone, I was the assistant engineer and my job was to select the right microphones for particular instruments. Still today, if there's a problem, as a musician my first instinct is not to reach for knobs, it's to figure out what's going on at the source. For the Late Show, we've certainly used a host of microphones for different applications. I was still excited, though, when Eric Mayer from Neumann dropped by with the new TLM 103 cardioid condenser mic.

The first chance I had to use it was when Wynton Marsalis was on the show in July. Normally, he uses a chrome-plated TLM 170 but I went ahead and set up the TLM 103 for rehearsal. As soon as he started playing, the first thing I noticed was that the gain was just right. Even though Wynton began with such a soft tone, and then squeezed it out into a nice open sound, I was able to pull it out without picking up too much mic noise. It was amazing because Wynton's sound was little more than a breath - and he was blowing two or three feet away from the mic! The low noise characteristic of this mic was very important in this situation. And the gain range was perfect. I expected this mic to have a hot output, but it was just right. The preamp gain was right where I like it.

Another thing I noticed was that the pattern is tight enough so that we could use the TLM 103 with the PA system. Again, Wynton was two or three feet away from the mic and we had no problems with feedback. And this is with the center cluster almost right over his head. I had him this far from the mic because I wanted to get the whole sound of the horn; the "air". What I was looking for was a natural trumpet sound with no effects; I just wanted to hear Wynton Marsalis's trumpet as if I were standing 15 feet away. And the TLM 103 did the job, without any EQ at all!

The 103 is sexy looking, too. What I like most about it's physical appearance, though, is it's size. It's small enough so that no director is going to come around and say "can't you find anything smaller?" The U 87 was always my favorite for vocals on records but it's too big for TV. The TLM 103 cuts the mustard and it's great for live TV.

For the past year or so we've also been using a different Neumann mic, the KM 184, for acoustic instruments. We had been trying everything we could find on the hi-hat without much success. Then I got a KM 184, and the first night I used it on the hat, my PA engineer called down immediately and said "You've finally found a real hi hat mic!" It's got a real smooth character with plenty of output which allows me to tailor the sound the way I need to.

Another great use for the KM 184 is on acoustic bass. The typical way I use it here is to wrap it in foam and stick it in the bridge of the bass. Most acoustic bass players show up with a DI but it's great when I can blend in some of the acoustic sound. Acoustic guitar is also great on the KM 184. We had the Chieftains in here and we got a great sound on the guitar with this thing. It's very low profile and easy to position. I'm always happy to have the '184 when we get guest bands in here. It pays off very nicely for folk instruments.

My overall opinion on the TLM 103 is that it's a real jewel in any mic collection. It's as close to a U 87 as any mic I've found and it's just a really great, flat instrument mic. The next time we get a Pavarotti or an Itzhak Perlman in here, I'm definitely going to use the TLM 103. It's got that nice, rich Neumann sound I really like. And the KM 184 is great too. In fact, I need to get a pair of those; I've only one at the moment

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