

TALKING GEAR WITH BILL BOTTRELL AND MIMI PARKER

Bill Bottrell is famous for his sumptuous-sounding signal chains. Here, he and his engineer Mimi Parker talk about some of the essential settings and techniques they use.

DRUMS

Bottrell: "I view bass and drums as one instrument. They should sound like one thing coming from the same space. My standard setting is two cardioid mics up front (usually two U47s), an SM57 close on the snare, and a U47FET with a windscreen on the bass drum, backed off a little. For a more rock 'n' roll sound, I'll put an 1176 on the front mics, which makes them sound more in-your-face."

Parker: "Bill is amazing at getting great sounds just from using three to five mics on a kit. He doesn't believe in miking every single drum in the kit, which I love and agree with. He may also put a KM54 on the hi-hat. Everything will go through the Neve 31102 pres, and then directly into Pro Tools."

BASS

Bottrell: "My starting point is often a small 15W Marshall amp that's modeled after the old blues Fender Champ and that I bought in the early 1980s. It has a wonderful tube preamp and a balanced line output. Unless the player wants to use his own amp, I like to plug the bass into the Marshall, put up the gain so there's a little bit of distortion, and turn the bass EQ all the way up and the treble all the way down. I'll also put a mic up, usually a U47FET. I don't use a compressor on the bass."

GUITARS

Bottrell: "Normally I place a Beyer M160 close on the speaker cabinet. If the amp is in a small room, I'll take another cardioid and put it above the amp and point it at the wall the speaker is facing to get the room reflections. For acoustics, I often use the KM54, a cardioid, placed near the player's hand or just underneath the hand, pointing at the hole and angled off because of the proximity effect. I used to love the sound of acoustic guitars from the 1940s, but today they sound too springy, bright, and ugly. So if the guitar player is cooperative, I'll put an SM57 as close to the body as you can get—perhaps a quarter inch away, just below the bridge. When you record like that, it takes all the top end away and the midrange speaks more loudly."

VOCALS

Bottrell: "The RCA KU3A ribbon mic is great, with a very specific old, warm sound. You have to be careful with it, because it can easily blow on an amp or with drums. Rosanne Cash was recorded with a U47. I used many different mics for Van Hunt, like the U47 for a more natural sound, the Sennheiser 409 for a couple of songs, and I recall taping a Styrofoam cup around a Sennheiser 441, and he was singing into the cup."

Parker: "The U47 is the vocal mic we use most, and it'll go into a Neve 31102 mic pre, into a DBX160VU compressor, into an LA2A, and then into Pro Tools."