

# MICROPHONES

## MALCOLM BURN

BY BILL DeMAIN

What do you do when your favorite microphone breaks in the middle of a session? Producer/engineer Malcolm Burn didn't want to have to ever answer that question, so over the last year, he set out to find a stand-in for his vintage **Neumann U 47**.

"This U-47, which is from the mid-'60s, is the one microphone I've found that's great on almost anything—vocals, acoustic guitar, tambourine, piano. So it became kind of a fixture for me. Anyone who walked in the door, no matter what the sound of their singing voice, the U 47 would always translate—male, female, loud singer, quiet singer. For example, some people have very round voices and you don't get a lot of breath in the top end. The 47 would take care of that. I've always been able to make it do exactly what I want."

With the price of vintage Neumanns hovering at the \$7,000 mark, Burn hesitated at buying another. Instead he decided to consider contemporary brands. "There's a relatively new line of mics called **Soundelux**, and they've said, 'What do people like about the 47? What do they like about the 67?' And they've basically created a modern version of each of those classic microphones, and tried to not only mimic, but in some ways improve the older mics—which they've done. They're beautiful microphones, very durable, very well-made. You can tell they can take a lot of abuse, which an older microphone might not be able to handle."

Burn heard through the engineering grapevine about another new microphone that was getting rave reviews—**Lawson**. After a trial run of a few weeks in the studio, he was won over by its versatility. "A lot of these newer microphones have these varying patterns on them that are actually at the power supply, so you can have



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*As a producer and engineer, Malcolm Burn has made records with Emmylou Harris, Patti Smith, Marc Cohn, Blue Rodeo and many others. His current projects include the sophomore release from Columbia artists Wood and the next Emmylou Harris record, due to begin later this year.*

the power supply in the control room and be adjusting that as the person's singing. The various patterns not only give you the configuration—directional or omnidirectional—but they also do influence the tonality of the microphone. Particularly with the Lawson, which has all kinds of variable shadings between settings. We discovered it was almost like a 4k boost-cut control.

"This Lawson **L 47** is the new star of the show for me," he continues. "It's amazingly versatile. We've been using it for everything in the studio. We never have any trouble with acoustic guitars now. It's bright enough for the acoustics to do what they're supposed to do in the mix without having to have that artificial top end that ends up making an acoustic guitar

sound like a brushing sound without any tonality. The Lawson allows you to have the tonality and the sense of clarity. Also we can really compress the hell out of it and it still retains some hi-fidelity qualities that a lot of other microphones never would."

Burn says that the Lawson has not only function, but form. "Physically, the microphone is really attractive. It's got this cool little blue light in it that gives it a neon blue glow. It indicates something to do with the impedance padding. It's cool though, because the singer can kind of close his eyes a little bit and see this blue light glowing and know 'that's there where I'm supposed to point my head.' I'm sure Gene Lawson didn't design that feature with that in mind, but it's actually quite useful."

While he's found his stand-in for his U 47, Burn says there are other microphones which he always keeps on hand in the studio. "I'll never stop using the **Shure SM 57**, because for some singers, that's the best microphone you can use. Another all-around favorite for me is the **Beyerdynamic M 88**. I find it very useful for many different instruments. It's super unidirectional, so you can record a vocal and have a guitar playing and it won't bleed in."

While he still believes in the power of vintage mics, Burn is now keeping one ear open to the latest technology. "I was kind of skeptical about it first, but then suddenly upon trying them, realized that they're actually great microphones without even being compared to older microphones. My impression is that these new microphones, like the Soundelux and especially the Lawson, are gaining a reputation, and they'll always be worth what you payed for them, and probably worth more eventually, as well." ■