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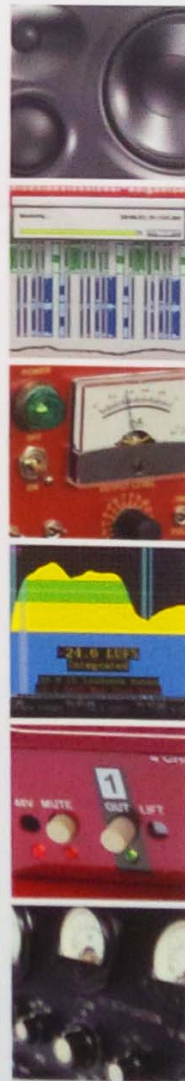
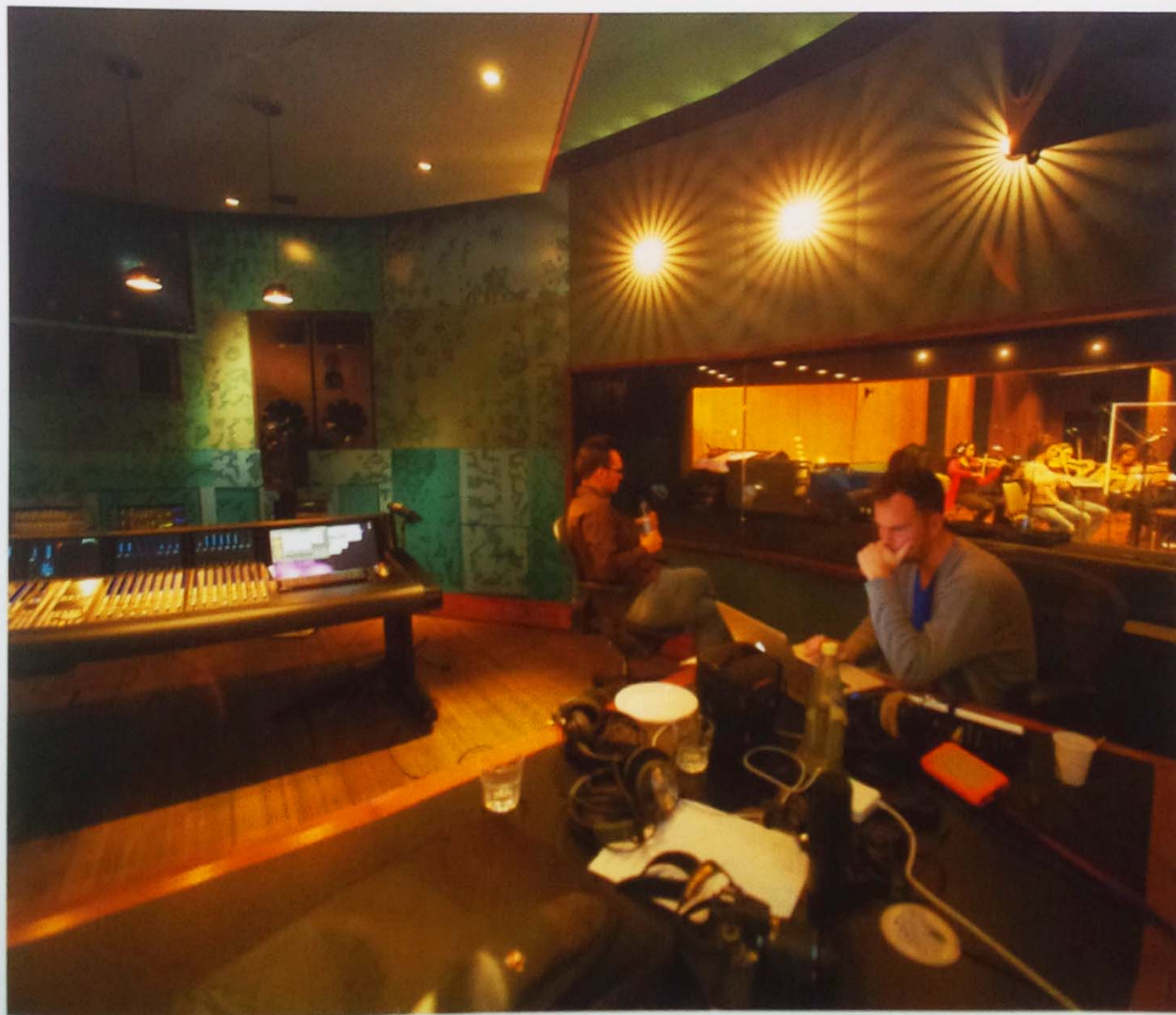
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Radial Gold Digger & Cherry Picker

The ability to switch between mics and preamps for the purposes of comparison can be achieved in a number of ways but these dedicated boxes for *Resolution's* mic and preamp reviewer **JON THORNTON** are timely and welcomed.

Audio problem-solvers are a strange breed of device in that sometimes you don't realise how much you need or want something until somebody builds it for you. Radial Engineering's newest pair of boxes are classic examples of the genre. Both are immediately recognisable as Radial devices, sharing the same brick-like form factor and the reassuring heft that only comes from casework manufactured from 14-gauge steel. Conceptually the function of the two boxes is easy to understand. The Gold Digger is a four-input, single output switcher, designed primarily as an easy way to audition multiple microphone sources. The Cherry Picker is the exact opposite — a single input, four-output switcher. Again, the key idea here is to allow a single microphone source to be easily switched into a number of different preamplifiers — although both boxes lend themselves equally well to other uses.

Looking in more detail at the Gold Digger to start with, all connections on the rear panel are balanced on XLR connections with four female and one male. Power, as is usual with this type of Radial box, is supplied from an external PSU. The front panel is divided into four sections — one for each of the inputs. Each section has a momentary action pushbutton for source selection, a stubby pot for level trim, and a recessed pushbutton switch for applying phantom power to any or all of the inputs (phantom power is provided by the unit itself and isolated from the output to avoid any possibility of nastiness when switching). Two LEDs for each section give positive visual feedback for which input is selected and whether phantom power is engaged or not.

Internally the Gold Digger is a 'straight wire' passive switcher, with no active circuitry that could possibly colour the sound. The switching itself is performed by military grade, gold contact relays. The level trims are entirely passive (i.e. effectively only attenuators) and allow microphones with hotter outputs to be trimmed down to match those with lower electrical sensitivities. The channel select pushbuttons work in XOR mode — selecting one channel cancels the previous selection, and only one channel can be selected at a time. The action seems to be that pushing the button in disconnects the previous selection, and releasing it again makes the new connection.

And it really is as simple as that. In truth the

switching isn't entirely silent — especially with high levels of preamp gain on quieter sources there's a slight 'bump' as channels are switched, but nothing that is really going to distract from the important task of comparing different microphones on critical sources. Granted, there's nothing you couldn't do with a reasonably competent mixing desk but if you're trying to audition mics through a particular piece of outboard rather than the console preamps it certainly makes things a little more straightforward and keeps signal path to a minimum.

Speaking of which, the Gold Digger's partner in crime is the Cherry Picker, designed to switch a single source to the inputs of multiple preamps. Here the rear panel provides four balanced outputs and one balanced input — again on XLR. The input can provide phantom power from the unit if required, and



another recessed pushbutton is provided for this on the front panel. Also on the front panel is a master mute switch, which mutes all four outputs so that preamp settings can be left undisturbed while changing the input source.

Four pushbuttons route the input signal to each of the outputs, following the same XOR logic as the Gold Digger, and each output also has a ground lift switch (signal ground on the corresponding output) to cure any potential ground loops. Like the Gold Digger, the Cherry Picker accomplishes its switching entirely passively using sealed relays, and again in practice it's very straightforward, if not entirely silent in operation.

It's when you put the two devices together that you really unlock the potential of what seem to be such straightforward products. In short order I was able to mix and match four different mics with four different mic preamps and, after a bit of fiddling with the Gold Digger's trim controls and preamp gains, audition any of the sixteen permutations at near identical levels. And this brings home a couple of stark and somewhat contradictory realities. The first is that 'subtle' is an understatement when comparing sonic differences between some preamplifiers. And the second is that particular pairings of microphone and preamp can truly be like night and day — and permutations that you may never have considered before can really surprise you.

Of course, as both devices are effectively just balanced audio switchers, they can be used for other purposes for line level or mic level signals — comparing a brace of compressors, or as a source selector or zone switcher, for example. The only feature that I'd perhaps like to see is some form of remote switching capability for the Gold Digger — in some situations this might make the plumbing a little more elegant from a studio to a control room as the box could be located in the studio. Other than that, they do exactly what they say on the tin and do it well.

Whether you see yourself needing or wanting either or both will come down to individual set-ups and working practices. But as somebody who routinely evaluates multiple microphone and preamp combos, they're an absolute godsend for me. ■

PROS Rugged; easy to use; useful passive trims on Gold Digger; permutation of the two can be a real ear opener.

CONS Switching not entirely silent; external PSUs add to an already 'busy' bit of audio plumbing.

EXTRAS The Radial MC3 monitor controller enables quick switching between reference monitors, sub woofer and headphones and sum to mono. It is 100% passive and doesn't add coloration and distortion.



The MC3 features a level control and each output is equipped with a top-mount 'set and forget' dial to fine tune outputs. The sub is augmented with a 180-degree polarity reverse and a separate Dim switch is adjustable. The box is equipped with a built-in headphone amplifier with 3.5mm and 1/4-inch outputs.

Contact

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