

TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

SPECIAL TEXAS ISSUE!

PAUL LEARY

Butthole Surfers, Meat Puppets, U2

STUART SULLIVAN

Sublime, Wire Recording

MIKE MCCARTHY

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TONY RANCICH

of Sonic Ranch

DAVID HOUGH

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With Grupo Fantasma

JAMIE HOWARTH

of Plangent Processes

MUSIC REVIEWS

GEAR REVIEWS

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CAPS ON FAJITAS
w/ rustic M9 & M7s



SDC BEAN DIP
old & new flavors



DYNAMIC TACOS
w/ AKG D19 flavors

Tape Op GEAR ReV



Radial Engineering

MS4 Gold Digger mic selector

PS4 Cherry Picker preamp selector

When you're setting up for a recording session, do you automatically settle on the same mic and preamp that you've used in the past, or do you spend the time to audition and select the combination of components that best complements the performance? I think most of us strive for the latter, but unfortunately, not every session affords us the time to connect one mic, run to the control room, turn on phantom power, listen, turn off phantom power, run back to the live room, disconnect the first mic, connect a second mic... and so forth. Even with an assistant, rewiring gear can take up valuable time, and perhaps more importantly, add inopportune interruptions to a session. Therefore, we oftentimes have to settle for the first mic and preamp combination that we think or hope will offer the best chance of capturing the performance. Moreover, even if we suffer through the gear swaps, is our short-term memory good enough to differentiate the subtle variances between the mic and preamp combinations that we just heard? To solve this dilemma, Radial Engineering comes to our rescue with two new must-have products.

The *MS4 Gold Digger* is a 4x1 mic selector that allows you to quickly A/B/C/D up to four mics at a time. The *PS4 Cherry Picker* is a 1x4 preamp selector that allows you to quickly do the same with four preamps. And yes, you can feed one into the other, allowing you to A/B/C/...O/P through all 16 combinations while sitting in the sweet spot of your control room.

The *Gold Digger* has four XLR mic inputs and one XLR mic-level output. Four "radio buttons" allow you to select any of the inputs, one at a time. Each input has an attenuating trim knob, so you can easily match all of the mic levels to that of the quietest mic. Four switches toggle 48 volt phantom power individually for each channel; these are recessed so you don't accidentally hit them when you're quickly "thumbing" through your mic inputs. A slight "click" noise does make its way into the output signal from the gold-plated relays when you switch mics, but it's nothing like the "pops" that could blow out your monitors (and ears) if you were physically connecting and disconnecting mic lines, especially with phantom power on. But otherwise, switching between mics is seamless, and makes true A/B'ing possible.

The *Cherry Picker* is shaped similarly to the *Gold Digger*, but it sports a single XLR mic input and four XLR mic-level outputs to patch to your preamps. Four radio buttons allow the mic to feed only one preamp at a time. A single, recessed, phantom power switch supplies 48 volts to the mic input, regardless of which preamp you have selected; therefore, you don't have to worry about configuring phantom power on the preamps, or the phantom power level changing (or "popping") during a preamp switchover. A global mute button on the mic input is handy when swapping out the mic or turning on/off phantom power — no need to turn down any of the preamps. And there are individual ground lifts for each preamp feed.

Both of these devices have completely passive audio paths, so in theory, they operate as "straight wire" switches. Are they 100% transparent? Well, that depends. For almost all mic/preamp combinations that I tested through the Radial devices versus straight cabling, I could not discern any difference in sound quality. On the other hand, when I tried a Cascade Gomez Michael Joly Edition ribbon mic [*Tape Op* #66] feeding a Great River MP-2NV preamp [#28] through the *Cherry Picker*, the MP-2NV's input impedance switch had far less effect than it does when the Gomez is connected directly to the MP-2NV. Normally, reducing the preamp's input impedance to 300 ohms reduces the Gomez's low-frequency and lower-midrange output, and adds a touch of highs, which I find helpful in a variety of situations. My guess is that the impedance at the input of the *Cherry Picker* is higher than the impedance of the MP-2NV's input alone. But again, for most mic/preamp combinations, I did not hear the *Cherry Picker* or *Gold Digger* impart anything to the sound, and the convenience and immediacy of A/B'ing several mic'ing chains far outweighed any concerns that there might be some inaudible effect.

Both devices are manufactured to Radial's impeccable quality standards. Radial's signature "bookend design" keeps the switches and knobs out of harm's way, and a full-bottom neoprene pad isolates the units from vibration while preventing them from slipping off whatever surface they're placed upon. If you have more than a couple mics and preamps in your collection, I cannot recommend the *Gold Digger* and *Cherry Picker* enough. These are two products that every studio should own. (\$349.99 street each; www.radialeng.com) —AH