



"For the first time in 10 years I heard the organ as it is supposed to sound."

January 1999 by Ray Brubacher

I just purchased two TLM 103s for my own personal use. I am a concert organist blessed with a fine pipe organ of my own design in my church. For ten years I have recorded with various makes of microphones and recorders and have never been satisfied with the sound I was getting. I recently purchased a DAT recorder and decided (and you've probably heard this thousands of times) that it's only as good as what you use to feed it with. Therefore, I blew my budget and purchased the 103s from Gene Ingham at Washington Music in Wheaton, MD

I have just completed a recording in time for Christmas and all I can say is "Wow"!! For the first time in 10 years I heard the organ as it is supposed to sound; with an absolutely superb and clean response all the way down. My system actually reproduced those 32 hz and lower frequencies to the point where I could clearly hear the pitch and not just the rumble. Though I thought long and hard before investing this much into each microphone, they have already paid for themselves as far as I am concerned. I know your files are full of thousands of accolades, and you can add one more. The TLM 103s are truly incredible units. I can hardly wait to use them again.

Here are the technical details of this recording:

Location: Oakdale Emory United Methodist Church, Olney, Maryland
Organ: Moller 3 manual 27 rank pipe organ built in 1986, final divisions installed in 1991 and 1996.

Recording equipment used: 2 Neumann TLM 103 microphones, Tascam DA20 MKII DAT recorder Mackie 1202 mixer (to provide phantom power only - no equalization employed, no mixing of channels. Signal from mixer fed directly into the DAT recorder without any processing.)

Oakdale Emory U.M. Church is a large brick structure with a wooden A frame roof with a seating capacity of 370. The Moller organ is installed on each side of the central stained glass window, great, swell and pedal divisions on the left, choir, pedal and unenclosed solo trumpet on the right. The organ speaks directly into the church without deep sound restricting chambers. The organ was designed by me and is as close to a vintage E.M. Skinner instrument as I could make it. There are many orchestral voices contained. The organ is versatile in that one can play any type of music from pre Bach to popular. The instrument is regularly used by me to accompany the great silent film classics of the past.

As any recording engineer knows, microphone placement is critical to the success of a fine recording. When one is working in a large room such as the Oakdale Emory sanctuary, it presents a nightmare of standing waves and other gremlins to destroy one's efforts to produce a good recording. You can move two feet and be blown away by the organ's 32 foot and 16 foot stops, two feet in the other direction and "no pedal."

Two late evening recording sessions were used to judge microphone placement. The microphones were on stands and were approximately eight feet off the floor. After some twenty five different tests, I determined that the organ sounded best to my ears with the microphones being placed midway from the outer walls and in the fourth pew back, which is about 35 feet from the pipework.

I was most impressed with the TLM 103's ability to give incredible definition to the voices in the organ. The Clarinet and English Horn stops came through with a richness and clarity that I had never heard using any other microphones. The pedal soft 16 foot Subbass is clear and defined all the way down to low C (approx. 32 hz) and each pitch is clearly heard instead of a non descript rumble I hear on so many recordings.

Incidentally, and you may find this hard to believe. I still use two RCA 44A velocity ribbon microphones made in 1932 and still with their 40 lb cast iron claw foot stands for vocal recording. I love them dearly for that purpose.

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