



Recording The Steve Greene Trio

August 2000 by Bob Martin

Walking into a club where the Steve Greene Trio is playing their eclectic brand of acoustic swing is an inspiring experience. All the strumming and plucking one hears is completely unamplified creating a close, welcoming communion between performers and listeners. Typical audience chatter is replaced with the sound of hands gently drumming rhythm on tables, feet tapping in time, and perhaps even a hoot or howl as a solo unwinds. This intimate sound and feel is what I attempted to capture on the disc.

Recording the Steve Greene Trio 'Acoustic Living' CD, presented several unusual challenges: First, the Trio always plays acoustically, employing no sound reinforcement or amplification whatsoever - two archtop guitars and an upright bass, just like in the old days when what one saw was what one got. Second, Steve's personality is a key part of every performance, more so than with many musicians. Physical gestures often combine with humming, sighing, or other guttural urgings to underscore his improvisations. Third, Steve insisted that there be no noticeable signal processing on the recording. And finally, we all agreed, the 'vibe' had to be just right.

So, one evening in July of 1994, we set out to find the 'vibe.' Steve's basement serves as a teaching facility, general office, rehearsal space and recording studio. Because there is so much of Steve's real life happening there, it was the natural place to search for the vibe. We began by setting up the Trio in a corner of the studio and placing the microphones.

Looking for a true archtop sound that would also reflect each instrument's personality, we chose to close-mic the guitars with Neumann large-diaphragm mics. On Steve's guitar (a 1947 Gibson L7 non-cutaway) we used a Neumann U 87ai positioned near the upper bout, close to where the guitar neck joins the body, agreeing that the U 87 fit the more mellow tone of the L7 perfectly. Roy's 1951 Epiphone Triumph (another non-cutaway guitar) has a louder, more biting tone than the L7, so we chose a Neumann TLM 170 and set it up in the same basic position.

Placement was critical in order to catch the sweet spot on each guitar. On the upright bass we used a more distant mic for ambient sound. We also pulled a direct line from the pickup installed on the bridge of Paul's bass and the final mix has a bit of both, leaning more on the direct line. All were fed through an Alesis 1622 board and into an original issue ADAT.

After mic setup, we spent a while literally moving the band around the studio, trying to find a place that sounded good for the recording and that worked well for the musicians. The Trio wanted to play just as they would on a stage - using no headphones or monitors - hearing each other along with the room ambiance. We finally found a place that suited our criteria, thus establishing the 'vibe,' and recording commenced.

We weren't concerned about sound leaking between the mics, and actually encouraged it by opening up the patterns. Each song was performed start to finish with no overdubs, and the leakage contributed to the feel and sound that we were after.

After setup, producing was easy. Interacting with the band to keep the feel both light and up beat as they played was my main contribution to the CD, aside from acting as engineer. The musicianship is top-notch, and the sound we captured most definitely achieves that intimate feel we had set out to duplicate. We recorded for about a week and, after selecting the final tracks, gave the tapes to Seth Walz, who handled the mixing/EQing and (shh... don't tell Steve...) a little bit of digital reverb. Seth's work on mastering was some of the best that I have ever heard - a GREAT job.

I am amazed and delighted that in a non climate controlled studio, in the heat and humidity of an upstate New York July, we managed to get completely consistent performance from our gear, day after day. The Neumann mics provided a much needed reference point and delivered true sound from start to finish. They also contributed to the vintage nature of the tone - Neumann's large diaphragm mics have been used for this sound since the early days so, for us, there was no question that these were the right tools for the job.

The Steve Greene Trio 'Acoustic Living' project was a most enjoyable experience and from it, we produced a recording that crosses a great number of musical barriers. Listeners who don't typically like jazz enjoy this recording and it has also found great favor with jazz cats for its understated, deceptively simple performances. Neumann was an integral part of this recording, and I thank them for years of making the world's best mics.

Update: Gene Bertocini and Steve Greene

In July 1999, we began recording tracks for a new CD featuring Steve Greene and world-renowned guitarist Gene Bertocini which is to be titled "Gene with Greene". Due out in November 2000, we recorded in three sessions between July 1999 and April 2000.

We utilized different miking techniques on these sessions to achieve a more "up close and personal" sound. On each of the two guitars, we placed a KM 184 on the lower bout, near the bridge and a TLM 193 on the upper bout, near where the neck and body meet. Plus, Gene has a transducer system in his Buscarino Cabaret guitar (nylon-stringed, classical style with cutaway) from which, we took a direct feed.

As mixing is not yet complete, I won't comment on the final sound, but the rough tracks sound stunning. Most surprising is the sound that the KM 184 turned in, picking up the bass frequencies of the guitars, while the TLM 193 delivered a beautiful set of transients without the gloss usually associated with high frequencies when recording a guitar.

I will have a more full story as the project gets wrapped up, but right now, we couldn't be happier.

Bob Martin lives and works in Rochester, NY. As owner of RTM & Associates, Inc., he heads the advertising agency serving Neumann USA (and insists that he would have used Neumann mics regardless of the affiliation). He is an avid guitarist, and is currently producing a CD with Steve Greene and legendary jazz guitarist Gene Bertocini.

- ▶ <http://www.stevegreene.com>
- ▶ [Steve Green Trio CD: Acoustic Living](#)
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