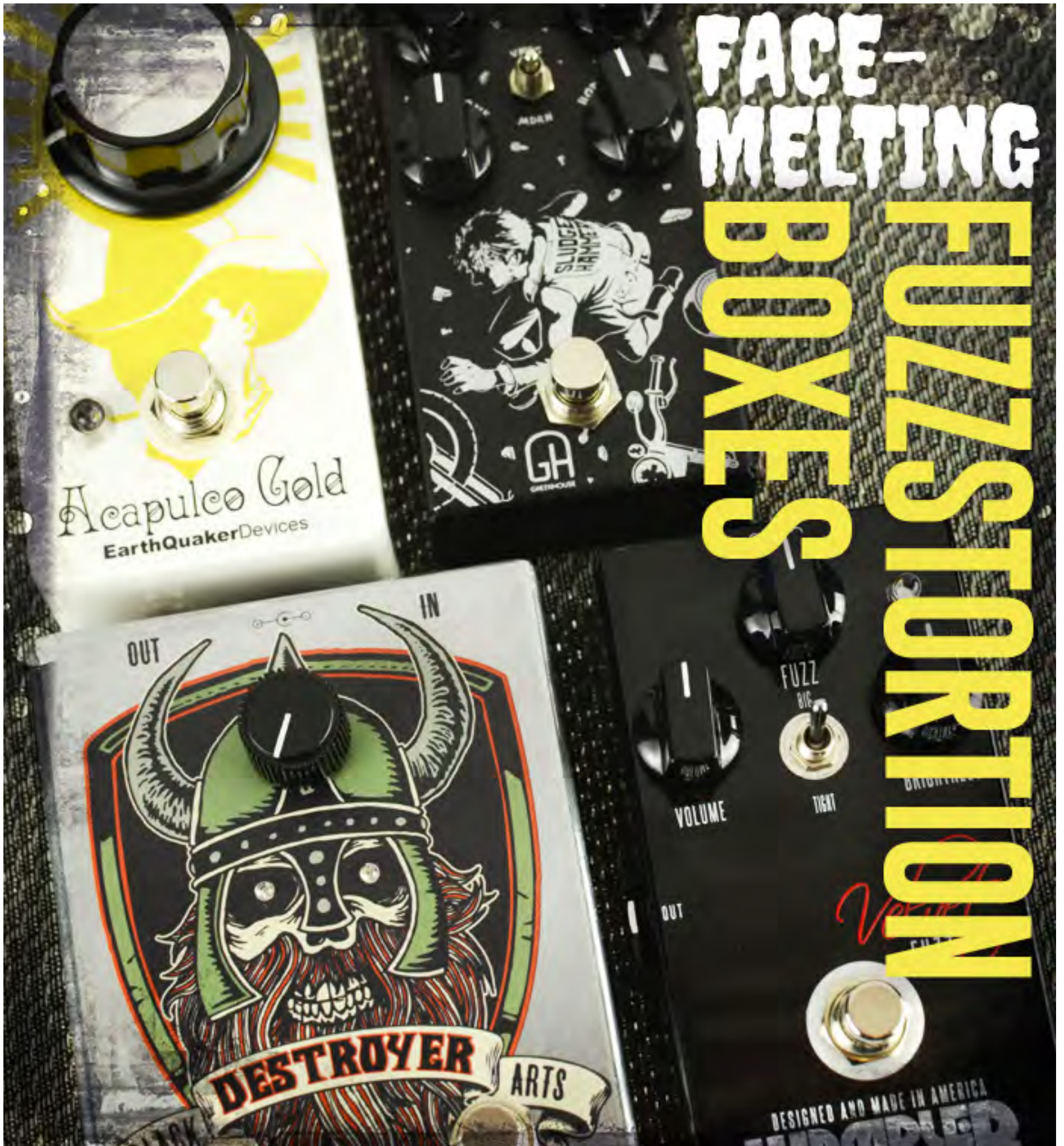


# TONE REPORT

DECEMBER 25TH, 2015

WEEKLY

PLAY 'TIL YOUR FINGERS BLEED





# MICROPHONE SHOOTOUT: WHICH SOUNDS BEST FOR YOUR RIG?



WORDS BY: YOEL KREISLER



If there's one thing I've learned from my years on "the quest," it's that wherever your journeys take you, be it amber waves of gain or the dank caverns and cool waters of modulation, the GAS will always be there like a familiar old friend. If you go beyond the straight and narrow path of guitars, you will find the world of music has far too much to offer, and the GAS that used to nag at you for the latest fuzz or overdrive now blows up to dangerously huge proportions. Suddenly, you start to see things differently, and that old familiar lust for the perfect tone has now expanded the signal chain. Microphones, preamps, mixing consoles, and tape machines begin to catch your eye, as every imaginable aspect of your tone comes into focus. I can't promise I'm going to get you the tone in your head, but in this week's feature, I hope to get you just a little bit closer. Today, I'm going to painstakingly detail four mics you may or may not have tried, to help you get that tone you hear in your head and (hopefully) in your room, committed to a listenable format for all the world to enjoy, and not just your lovely neighbors.

## THE LOWDOWN:

Today, I have taken four different mics, each representing a different style of mic used commonly on guitar cabinets. There is a dynamic, condenser, ribbon, and handheld mic on the chopping block, and each has a different response that work for a variety of situations. Each mic has been set up differently, to really capture the differences between these mics and how you would use them in a recording situation. There is a clean, crunchy, and distorted clip for each mic, and all of the clips were recorded on the same day, in the same room, and were looped through a looper, so there is absolutely no variation in the playing.

## THE SIGNAL PATH IS AS FOLLOWS:

**CLEAN:** Fender Stratocaster with D. Allen Echoes pickups->Hi-Tone DR-30/15->Mic->Focusrite 2i2

**CRUNCH:** Fender Stratocaster->Boss BD-2 Blues Driver->Hi-Tone DR-30/15->Mic->Focusrite 2i2

**DISTORTED:** Fender Stratocaster->Vick Audio V-2->Hi-Tone DR-30/15->Mic->Focusrite 2i2

**NOTE:** No EQ or pre/post effects were added. Remember, that a guitar tone you hear on a record has most likely been equalized, and does not sound like this. These demos are just to demonstrate the basic tones achieved with different styles of mics.

# THE MICS

## SHURE SM57

The Shure SM57 is the classic choice as a guitar cab mic both on stage and in the studio. It is favored for its bulletproof design, unique midrange response, and high SPL (sound pressure level) capabilities. We have discussed the SM57 before in previous articles, but today we're going to actually hear what it sounds like in a recording context. It is a dynamic mic, and has a cardioid pickup pattern, which means it does not need phantom power to get signal, and only picks up what in front of it.

**IMPRESSIONS:** The SM57 has an incredibly focused midrange, and this really shines during the clean clip, showcasing the midrange grunt of the Hi-Tone. However, during the crunchy and distorted clips it sounded a little anemic, due to the extra lower and upper harmonic detail brought in by the BD-2 and V-2 that the very focused SM57 failed to capture well. This can be remedied by moving the mic around a bit and experimenting with different angles and positioning.





# ROSWELL AUDIO MINI K47

I stumbled upon this relatively new offering from Roswell Audio while reading a review in *Tape Op*. This little mic features a K47 capsule, which is almost identical to the mic capsule used in the coveted and incredibly expensive Neumann mics. This mic is a condenser, so it will require phantom power. Condensers are typically brighter and more detailed across the frequency spectrum, and can be very good for capturing high end detail in a guitar cabinet, although some can be a little too topky for guitar cab use, especially with bright sounding guitars and amps. However, the K47 preforms incredibly well for a mic at this price point, and sounds better than any condenser I've ever used on guitars.

**IMPRESSIONS:** For a condenser mic, this is incredibly warm. It really captured the detail of each clip, and brought forth a bit of high end sparkle to each tone. On all fronts it really succeeded where most condensers fail: adding color and smooth high-end detail to even the most basic of guitar tones.





I've had my eye on the Cascade Fathead for at least two years now. It's a ribbon mic, which means instead of using a capsule or diaphragm, it uses a small aluminum ribbon elements which picks up vibrations and converts them into electricity. Ribbon mics were one of the first kinds of microphone available, and kind of fell into obscurity around the late '60s. However, they have recently made a huge comeback, and are loved for their warmth and roundedness. They are used on horns, strings, overheads for drumkits, and many more sources, but they prove incredibly popular on guitar cabs, since their midrange response is incredibly warm and fat. The Fathead is one of the most popular ribbon models today along with the Coles and Royer offerings, and is affordable enough to own in a home studio without bleeding you dry. Many of the problems that vintage ribbon mics had (running phantom power through them would blow them up, they were incredibly delicate, etc.) were done away with on the Fathead. Running phantom power through it won't harm it at all, and the active mode on this particular model actually requires phantom power for the internal preamp (like a condenser).

# CASCADE FATHEAD ACTIVE/PASSIVE







**IMPRESSIONS:** Big, fat, and warm. While it doesn't have the detail of the K47 or the focus of the SM57, the Fathead (in both active and passive mode) really brings out the lows and low-mids. It's got a bit of a high-end rolloff that can easily be equalized back into the mixing stage if so desired, but the way it really captures the buttery meat and 'taters of the amp is what makes it so desirable. In Active mode, it's got a bit more punch and it's a little darker, whereas in Passive mode the high end is a little more prevalent. It really hits you in the gut, and on the mid-heavy Hi-Tone it sounds positively huge.



I originally found and bought the H2n when looking for a handheld mic to record ambient sound effects out in the world for my various projects. To this day (and yes, I have listened to binaural audio), I find the Zoom H2n recordings paired with a good set of headphones or studio monitors to be the closest thing to actually being in the space. While walking around with this thing, you will discover a whole new world of sound, and I heartily recommend it to anyone in the market for a handheld recorder. As it happens, one day I was recording a demo of my Leslie for a friend, and I didn't want to hook up my SM57, because I wanted to capture the room reflections that make the Leslie so iconic. I put the H2n a few feet back, cranked the living daylights out of the Leslie, and I was rewarded with an incredibly rich and accurate sound, just like the one I heard in the room. The sound of the H2n is incredibly honest, is rich with detail, and best of all, and is very quick and easy for high quality demo work when you don't want to go through the hassle of putting a mic on your amp.

**IMPRESSIONS:** Incredibly accurate, and a cool trip. Listen to this one on headphones, as it really sounds like your face is right up against the amp. It captures a certain amount of reflection that the others didn't capture (thankfully), but in our case, it really brought out a lot of detail I heard in the room while recording that you can't hear on most of the tracks. This is the closest you'll get to being right there with me in the room with your head in front of my amp (whether or not that's your idea of a good time is entirely up to you).

# ZOOM H2N



There you have it, distinguished readers; I have presented you with the information, but what of the conclusion? The obnoxiously existential answer is, there is no answer. Each person has different tastes, and there is a different mic for each situation that you would need. I have done my best to provide you with what I can, now it is up to you to go forth, experiment, and make your spouse question your sanity.