

Bay Area group Walken happens to have an actual one, so we could see how the imitation stacked up against the real deal.

What we got surprised us.

Well, it might not have been so surprising to find out that miking the Vetta gave a superior sound in terms of crunch, bite, warmth, and presence than recording direct, but the direct recording wasn't bad at all. The DI signal was a bit thin and muddy, but it wasn't something we'd turn our noses up at if we were in a bind.

"There is that extra 10 percent that you can get out of the guitar amp, if you work at it," said Andy Sneap, metal producer extraordinaire, from his Backstage Studios in England. "I don't think amp modelers are the do all and end all. They are a way to get a good, workable tone very fast. At the end of the day, it is an imitation of something. I was a bit dubious about the whole amp modeler side of things. I had never really heard them sound that good, until the Pod xt Pro came out. I'm actually really

impressed with it. I still wouldn't put it above a good amp with an SM57, and a good cab with Vintage 30s. But if you're in a position where you can't make a lot of noise, or you're recording at home, the Pod xt Pro is definitely the way to go. I've got programs like Amplitude and Amp Farm, and I haven't found any of them that sound as good as that POD, but then again I haven't found anything that sounds as good as a Peavey 5150 or a Boogie with a SM57 in the right place."

NOT-SO-QUICK PICKS

CHARTEROAK SA538B TUBE MIC

[\$1,399 via charteroakacoustics.com]

So we got this cool mic here from CharterOak. Cool box. Even the cardboard part it was shipped in was printed with their cool-looking silhouette of a big old oak tree. I was in the middle of mixing a record on ROIR, called "Dub Trio." Everyone in the room was like, "ooh . . . aaahhh!" about the box alone. Nice touch. I open the thing up, and we all said, "ooh, aah" because this is a great-looking package, and obviously well made from Jump Street. I mean the *shock-mount* is BEAUTIFUL. I don't just mean, like, OK, or kind of OK: awesome. First class. It's made to last, and is very functional. I weigh about 190, and I felt like if I hung from it (as I often do), it wouldn't even bend. SOLID. The mic weighs a ton as well, so I guess it's good that someone actually put some thought into how it would stay off the floor. . . .

So, OK: The mic looks really nice, and the shock-mount rocks . . . but is it any good as a recording device?

Hell yes.

This mic is a touch bright, but no more so than a C12 in good shape. I don't normally like bright mics, but this one has the *oomph* in other places that really makes it kill.

And I tried this mic with a variety of common mic pres, uncommon mic pres, and downright obscure mic pres: always cool [though some better than others]. The mic pre REALLY seems to affect the sound of this thing, more so than with many other tube mics I own or operate daily. With the Neve 34120 mic pre in my sidecar (class A, discrete 70dB) the mic really sounded wide open, but not as gnarly in the top end as with a Sytek (surprise, right?), and the mic really came to life using a Manley VTL mono tube reference pre. Amazing with that combo.

But I had to record some piano for a very sparse, weird arrangement where the overall tone was really going to affect the presentation of some odd interval and note choices, and with the CharterOak in figure 8, on a big upright piano, a Sage electronics class A mic pre [the SE-PRE1], and a Pultec EQP1 I got one of the most amazingly detailed, forward, lifelike piano sounds I have ever recorded with any single microphone. Really. An upright, two feet from a wooden wall,

with the mic between the soundboard and the wall, in figure 8: amazing. The Sage pre really is amazing, so I was really sure we would get it with that one. The bottom of the piano was resonant and solid, the mids were insanely detailed, and the hammer/highs were simply perfect. The overtone series represented by this odd piece of music came flying out of the speakers at my head! Awesome.

On drums as a mono ambient mic this thing was a little bright for my tastes, but it DID have some amazing detail when I rolled back some 16k on the Pultec. Then it really came to life, and just sounded HUGE

through the Manley pre and the Neve 33609. ONE mic really was the whole kit. Super balanced from top to bottom when you roll the highs down a touch. . . . To tape this mic would be really good, so I printed some drums to the Studer 827 I have, and wow. Really liked that. The "right bright" on drums. I am glad I got the B, which is the "extended bass response" version. I can't even imagine this mic without the OOMPH on the bottom. So great. Transparent, yet solid, with none of the wooly cartoon of tube mic BS people are trying to pass off on consumers these days. This thing is for real. Blow Marlboro smoke in it for 20 years if you



want it to sound more "vintage" (or, as I found out yesterday, tailor the sound by working with the manufacturer). The website has all the tech specs. I skimmed over them and got bored and put the thing on a stand and got psyched again. . . .

After meeting the person responsible for this microphone at AES, and finding out that he is absolutely willing to tailor the sound of the microphone to YOUR tastes (!!!!), I really started to feel like this company and its products are absolutely something everyone needs to get hip to.

Anyway, the bottom line is this: In a condenser world gone crazy, this microphone is a welcome addition to any mic collection. I have a bunch of choices of tube mic, many classics, and CharterOak is going to have to drive down from CT and whoop me to get it back. I really, really like it. Thank you for making a really great microphone, and having a cool aesthetic. I LOVE that this is not simply a copy of anything: It is a great microphone that does not need to glom on to some bullshit historical validation to try and find a home.

Thank you, CharterOak! —Joel Hamilton