



Turning a Love of Vintage Microphones into a Burgeoning Recording Business

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Turning a Love of Vintage Microphones into a Burgeoning Recording Business, Toni Fishman is passionate about Neumann microphones. So passionate, in fact, that the lifelong Connecticut resident has founded three unique and growing enterprises that all incorporate the legendary microphone brand in one form or another.

Take Mountainside Mobile, for example. This mobile facility was established in 1998 to provide on-the-go recording services at locations nationwide. Or VintageTones, a two-year-old rental business incorporating one of the largest mint condition collections of Neumanns in the country. Lastly, there's Fishman's newest endeavor: Talcott Mountain Studio. This world-class recording studio boasts an array of cutting-edge equipment, yet is situated in picturesque Simsbury, Connecticut.

Growing up in West Hartford, Fishman's interest in live recording began when he purchased his first pair of Neumann KM 54 (which he regrettably sold, but later replaced) microphones at fifteen to record numerous Grateful Dead shows. After high school he worked in a camera store in the late '80s instilling an equal love of photography and video. From there he moved on to a high-end stereo shop. By the mid-'90s he was heavily involved in the touring rock and roll scene, recording shows across the country.

With growing experience in critical recording tools and techniques, Fishman began to conclude that the older the microphone, the better it sounded. This led to a lifelong search of vintage microphones with an emphasis on Neumann.

VintageTones Preserves a Legend

In October 2000, a chance conversation with vintage audio dealer Dan Alexander provided Fishman the opportunity to purchase a large portion of the vintage microphone selection of the now defunct Warner/Reprise Nashville studio. Alexander was commissioned to sell the collection by studio manager/engineer/producer Robert Tassi.

With over a dozen new and vintage Neumann microphones already in the VintageTones collection, Fishman took the leap and purchased thirty of the legendary studio's vintage cache. The outstanding collection has been used on countless gold and platinum recordings by artists like Emmylou Harris, Willie Nelson, Travis Tritt, Dwight Yokam and other legendary performers.

"Our core desire with VintageTones is to help raise the level of quality of New England recordings by providing the highest quality microphones to area studios," Fishman says. "Some of my favorite newer Neumanns are the TLM 103, which I use extensively on electric guitar amps, and the M 149, which we use on everything."

Mountainside Mobile

The oldest of Fishman's enterprises, known as Mountainside Mobile, began in the aftermath of a paralyzing injury to good friend Brian Hasselman. It was then that Fishman and Hasselman made the decision to create a unique handicap-accessible mobile recording facility. The pair began with a 1992 Ford Shuttle bus once used by the University of Hartford Hartt School of Music and equipped with automatic lift. This lift doubles as both a wheelchair lift and a means of loading equipment in and out of the vehicle. First gutting the shuttle bus and entirely refurbishing its mechanics, it was then outfitted with an 8000-watt Onan generator similar to those used in Desert Storm.

"Another unique thing about the truck is its small but comfortable footprint that allows us to record street-side in New York or Boston without need for permits," notes Fishman. Combining state-of-the-art mobile recording with extreme versatility and a low profile have kept the mobile studio busy since its debut. Mountainside Mobile makes greater use of newer Neumanns rather than vintage models like the KMS 105, the U 87 or smaller condensers like the KM 100 line.

In just over two years, the mobile unit has recorded countless regional and national artist and events ranging from Acoustic Junction Live at the Iron Horse to Gov't Mule with Leslie West at New York City's Irving Plaza. A few other standout dates include recording KVHW (one of San Francisco's best bands featuring Steve Kimock, Jerry Garcia's favorite guitarist), John Medeski and Chris Wood of Medeski Martin and Wood, Derek Trucks Band and The Gathering of the Vibes Festival at Seaside Park in Bridgeport, Connecticut. This line-up of 25 bands included Bob Weir, David Grisman, Les Claypool, Warren Haynes and other world-class talents.

"The truck was designed for festival recording and we hope to branch out to others like the Berkshire Mountain Music Festival and the Pokenos Musical Gathering on The Mountain," Fishman explains. Another interest is classical recording of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra's Talcott Mountain Music Festival-just around the corner from his studio home base.

Peace, Quiet and Spherical Content

In contrast to Mountainside Mobile's versatility is Fishman's home recording environment on his rural property. Talcott Mountain is an artist's retreat rather than a commercial studio. Open to select artists, producers and engineers looking for a relaxed short-term living environment conducive to creativity, the facility provides the peace and beauty of rural living with the potential for state-of-the-art recording. After a lengthy construction process Fishman began official recording applications in January 2001.

The studio's main console is a Neve 8032 with GML automation formerly owned by New York City's Hit Factory (and once owned and modified by legendary producer Bruce Swedien). Multitrack machines include Studer A827 two-inch, Otari MTR90 MK2 and Studer A820 half inch. The studio also features DTRS Tascam D/A98's and D/A38's as well as a full Pro Tools system. Fishman will soon be upgrading to 24 bit DTRS and/or hard disk recorders. Studio monitors feature B & W 25th Anniversary Edition 801 matrix monitors. Meyer HD1 and Genelec 1031A as well as other monitors are available upon request. Talcott Mountain also offers in-house CD duplication and numerous choices in CD-R recorders.

While all three businesses are new and growing on the scene, future plans call for corporate structuring under the umbrella of Mountainside Records & Entertainment. This will bring all three separate entities into a true symbiotic relationship with the addition of a record label and full roster of artists. All three entities are run by Toni Fishman with Dave Shuman as studio manager. Both juggle engineer and producer assignments.

A major innovative for the future is the inclusion of 360 degree streaming spherical content. The cutting-edge technology, geared to Internet delivery, allows a full 360-degree viewer-selectable angle video image of any live or recorded event and is augmented by Talcott Mountain Studio's extensive video and photographic production equipment. As a provider of this emerging technology, Fishman and company are poised for business with giants ranging from AOL/Time Warner and Paramount to Viacom, parent of both VH1 And MTV.

