

ROAD TESTS

Sabine True Mobility Wireless System

By Cheryl Evans

It's not often that I beg. But when I ran across the Sabine True Mobility Wireless System when it was introduced at Winter NAMM '99, I knew I had to be the one to review this piece of gear. By Summer NAMM '99, where it was featured, I was salivating hard, but by Winter '00, I got straight out aggressive. See, I'm a chick singer who loves to go out in the audience, and usually my mic is run hotter than any other on stage, meaning that when I step off into the crowd I'm often met with screams from the audience ... screams of pain from the piercing feedback.

Sabine's cool system is a single-space rack mountable unit that includes the industry-standard FBX Feedback Exterminator®, an auto de-esser, and a compressor. All this dedicated to one



microphone channel, not the whole band. They call this Targeted Input Processing, because it allows each mic to get precise, targeted control, and no mic gets more processing than it needs. I call this a brilliant idea!

Setting It Up

One thing us reviewers at Gig are famous for is taking a piece of gear out and just opening the box right then and there, without reading the manual first. Not one to buck the system, I was overjoyed to find a "Targeted Input Processing Quick Setup" cheat sheet printed right on the top of the SWM-3000 UHF receiver unit. My soundman (AKA keyboard player) was concerned that this new piece of gear would require a com-

plicated and time-consuming setup, and our load-in time at this gig was limited. We were pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to get this unit up and running. After plugging the unit into the board (it offers both balanced XLR and unbalanced 1/4" outs on the rear of the unit), and turning on the receiver, transmitter and mic, we positioned the microphone in the primary area of use. Then we pressed and held the "setup" button located on the front panel of the receiver, slowly raising the gain on the mixer until the FBX eliminated the first few feedback tones. I then moved the mic around the stage, again raising the gain on the mixer until feedback came and went. Holding my ears in distrust, each time the screech was caught and eliminated. This step is repeated until the setup indicator automatically goes off and the "ready" light is on. You can quit the setup mode at any time by just pressing the ready button—and the unit must be in "ready" mode for performance. What this process does is set the fixed filters.

The Sabine True Mobility Wireless System provides a total of 10 filters for feedback control. Fixed filters do not change frequency or depth once they are set up. The dynamic filters do change, catching frequencies not attenuated during setup. The default setting makes seven of these filters fixed and three dynamic, but this can be changed to eight fixed and two dynamic by changing an internal DIP switch. The unit's default setting of .10 octave can also be changed to .20 using an internal DIP switch ... those are pretty narrow notches that don't audibly affect vocal tone. All fixed filters remain in place until the setup button is pushed and held, and dynamic filters are in place until new feedback occurs.

There is a bypass button on the face of the receiver that bypasses the FBX. The de-esser knob starts at the "off" position and reduces sibilance when turned clockwise. The compressor has Ratio, Threshold, and Attack knobs on the front of the unit, and the cheat sheet decal shows typical setting for vocals and guitar. Setting the Ratio knob to fully counterclockwise (1:1) effectively bypasses compression. All these knobs are simple to operate, although small in size.

The handheld microphone transmitter (a belt pack transmitter is also available) felt comfortable in my hand. Even though it took me a while to figure out where to put the 9-volt battery (you twist



Sabine *continued*

off the head of the mic), placement and changing the battery during performance was fairly easy.

The Sabine has a two-stage squelch system that allows you to turn off the transmitter while the sound system is on, without pops or clicks, which allows you to change batteries on the fly. One of the coolest parts of this system is the dual battery charger located in a small drawer on the front of the receiver. I have been in a panic more than once at the sudden realization that I was out of 9-volts when my battery was dying I even stole the battery out of the garage door opener in my car one night when my last one died!

There are always two NiMH rechargeable batteries cooking in the receiver while you're on stage. Although the unit only ships with one uncharged battery, I'd buy two extra right away and keep them in the charger for backup. You have to be careful to remove the batteries when the receiver is unplugged because they will discharge if left in the charger for an extended period of time. An LED on the transmitter lets you know when the battery is weak and needs to be replaced.

Sabine True Mobility UHF systems are preprogrammed with 30 switchable combinations of Groups/Channels; VHF systems have 16 switchable channels. Channel and group selectors are located on the front of the receiver and under a sliding door on the handheld transmitter. You can use multiple wireless units without interference.

But Did It Work?

We started the show and I was immediately happy with the vocal sound. I had just reviewed another well-respected (and more expensive) wireless, and never felt the warmth that I felt with the Sabine. My sound mixer felt a need to increase the high end from my usual settings, which usually causes increased sibilance. I hate sibilance more than anything, and have always wanted a de-esser, but the band never felt a need for one. With this system I can have one all to myself, and I really noticed and appreciated the difference.

But the big test came later in the night, when, with the dance floor packed, I jumped right out in front of the mains and shoved the microphone into the audience for them to sing along. My usual dirty look to the sound guy to turn down my channel while

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I'm on the dance floor was turned into a smile when the feedback was caught and eliminated!

One of the first things I noticed when I took the Sabine out of the box was how sturdy the unit felt. Most wireless units feel light and fragile, and are often half rack systems. I wasn't surprised that the SWM-3000 receiver suffered no damage when it took a five-foot fall from the top of the rack that we had placed it on to the stage floor. I just picked the unit up, checked the settings on the face of the receiver and went on with the show.

Worth Begging For?

I had huge expectations of the Sabine True Mobility Wireless system, and I'm happy to say that the system met and exceeded my hopes and dreams. Whenever I demo a new mic I always have my tried-and-true system at the ready, and often feel the need to go back to my usual mic at sometime during the performance.

You'll have a hard time getting the Sabine away from me. I wonder if anyone knows it's my birthday this month, and, well ... I was thinking ...



SOUND CHECK

- Industry Standard FBX Feedback Exterminator®, auto de-esser and compressor · Targeted Input Processing · Dual NiMh 9-volt battery charger on receiver
- Quick setup
- Available in UHF and VHF systems (handheld, headset, or lavalier microphones, and belt-pack transmitters available) · SWM-3000 UHF \$949.99
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