

AUDIO-NEWS | An Interview at Studio La Marque Rose

Digital Workflows on the Seine

Ever since its founding, the French recording studio "La Marque Rose" has kept up with the times and has always implemented the most modern workflows. Here, even in the first link in the recording chain, the speech signals of the extroverted dubbing talents follow the digital pulse of the times. Numerous Solution-D microphones by German microphone manufacturer Neumann are in use here daily.

by Jan Bruhnke

The studio La Marque Rose, nestled in the heart of Paris, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Back then the studio primarily recorded audio for TV ads and commercials; today the highly motivated 44-person team head up by manager Jean-Luc Emanuele is dedicated to numerous aspects of audio postproduction.

Thus the studio website describes the highly sophisticated recording suites in somewhat florid terms as a place where Lara Croft and Sam Fisher converse with Paul Senior over the noise of a chopper speeding by, while R2D2 serves up the beers. Since the nineties, besides advertising jobs and TV dubbing, the Paris sound engineers have been working mainly in the area of video game localization. With eight new digital studios, they are superiorly equipped to do so.

In order to capture every nuance of the voice actors' performances and still keep up with deadlines in their day-to-day business, Jean-Luc Emanuele and his recording engineers rely, among other things, on several D-01 digital microphones in their recording signal chain.

DIGITAL PRODUCTION spoke with the studio owner about the audio postproduction workflow transition as well as his experiences with Neumann's digital microphones.

DP: Your studio started out in the late eighties doing audio for TV and radio spots; today you are involved in widely varying fields of produc-



Superior equipment In the eight digital studio control rooms, the signal of the Neumann digital microphones is run straight into the Pro Tools system.



New avenues The studio La Marque Rose relies on Neumann's D-01 digital microphone. Easy operation, plenty of headroom and unadulterated signals are some of the advantages.

tion such as the game sector. How important is it to keep developing along with the media industry?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: In our area of core competence, audio postproduction, we have continuously orientated ourselves according to industry trends and have always followed them. The dubbing market for television and localization, as it is called in the game industry, started up here already in the mid-nineties. With all due respect to technology, what matters most is making sure our voice actors feel at home.

The studio has undergone such vast changes since the days when we were still recording in my home studio in the late eighties, using an LEM EMU 4525 electret mike paired with a Shure SM7 for the foundation. Later, we got hold of a Neumann U67, or our "lovely", as we refer to her, for just 500 euros. Since then we have invested many times that much in tube and condenser mikes.

Today our three production mainstays are game localization, TV dubbing, and TV and radio production.

DP: Who are your clients at the moment?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: Key clients include the Discovery Channel, 20th Century Fox, Voyage, Filles TV, and NRJ12; moreover, we do localizations for EA, Sony, Microsoft, Warner, Activision, Lucasarts, Sega, and Ubisoft, among others.

DP: You are celebrating your 20th anniversary as a studio this year. How did you manage the transition to modern digital workflows du-

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Jean-Luc Emanuele The owner of the studio La Marque Rose is a pioneer when it comes to workflow.

ring the last days of your analog existence?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: Well actually, we have been on the road to digital with the studio already from

day one! The first recorders we had here were the Yamaha DMR8 and three AKAI DD1000s. The only tapes that we have ever used were quarter-inch tape for radio advertising clients and the Betacam SP format for TV. We decided to go with Pro Tools platforms in the mid-nineties and swapped out the analog mixing consoles for digital mix controllers as quickly as possible. What remains here today are fully digital studio environments and 5.1 Dolby suites with eight Pro Tools TDM systems and five Digi 002 interfaces. In our suites, we have the latest Macs running Pro Tools 7.4, networked with optical fiber cable. Furthermore, now we also use D-Controls, ProControls and the Dolby DP570, 571 and 572 Multichannel Audio Tools.

When it comes to monitoring, we rely on stuff by Genelec and Dynaudio. Our engineering equipment still includes some analog outboard equipment by Fearn, Universal Audio or Neve. In addition, we have Millennia preamps, Summit compressors, and some other rack treasures and many other special recording tools.

But our workhorse is Pro Tools; we always have a spare system in reserve in case something breaks down in a studio. We follow the principle "no compromises means no headaches", which makes everything as easy to run as possible for our internal and external employees...

DP: ... and furthermore, you decided early on to integrate Neumann's D-01 digital microphone in your workflow.

Jean-Luc Emanuele: That's right – we have tried out a lot of microphones since we settled on two basic production philosophies for the company: we wanted a big sound for ad recordings and absolute sound neutrality for dubbing work.

Now for advertising we use a Sanken CU-44X and, from time to time, our "darling", the Neumann U67, especially with female voices that are a little bit harsh. We used to use the AKG 451 and a U87 for dubbing, but we quickly decided to take a completely digital approach with the Solution-D D-01, in order to make everything simpler and more efficient. This has contributed considerably to the quality of our results. The noise has decreased, there is less distortion and unintentional coloration of the sound. With this mike, it is possible to continue recording even a year later without encountering phase problems. In the past, many customers did still ask about the old U87 and somewhat disconcerted at first, but the final results with the D-01 have always won them over in the end. Now we own five of them.

DP: Can you describe the advantages for us in a little more detail?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: Above all, the advantages are ease of operation, a clear workflow, plenty of headroom, the excellent signal-to-noise ratio, and especially the linear response paired with absolute reproducibility of the sound. You just don't have to mess around with different tubes, A-class chips or specific condenser capsules and

worry about how complicated it is going to be combine it all with the outboard. Now we are able to offer clients a 100-percent digital signal path. Our clients expect this sort of thing. Especially in the game industry, they need mainly dry speech signals. Of course, we also like a signal chain à la U67 plus a Millennia HV-3D preamp and the Summit DCL-200 compressor on top of that, but especially for these jobs, we are expected to deliver an unadulterated, noise-free signal. We now use the D-01 for seventy-five percent of our recordings.

DP: Do you use other models in Neumann's digital series, for example, the TLM 103 D?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: At the moment, we use only the D-01 model, because we often take advantage of the possibilities of the different directional characteristics and we have become accustomed to the perfect sound.

DP: What does your complete recording signal chain with the Neumann D-01 look like?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: At our studio, the D-01 signal with the 48 kHz / 24-bit default goes directly into the Pro Tools DAW via a digital AES input. We don't use any of the features of the Neumann software except the recording characteristics, the pre-attenuation circuit and

» The advantages are ease of operation, a clear workflow, plenty of headroom, the excellent signal-to-noise-ratio, and the linear response. «

the gain control. To be able to also control the latter by hand, we loop in a plug-in compressor in the channel path and then use its output fader, so that we can adapt to fluctuations in volume during voice recording.

We are satisfied with the Neumann software environment; the only thing that we miss is just a real fader with which one can influence the gain parameter of the mike dynamically. Maybe Neumann's developers will implement this suggestion in the future.

DP: If you had just one wish, what function would the developers implement in the D-Series in the future?

Jean-Luc Emanuele: It would be fantastic if sometime it became possible to emulate various Neumann classics digitally. Perhaps by means of the internally installed DSP or also with the help of the Neumann software. > jb



Session D-01 in action A voice recording session at Studio La Marque Rose