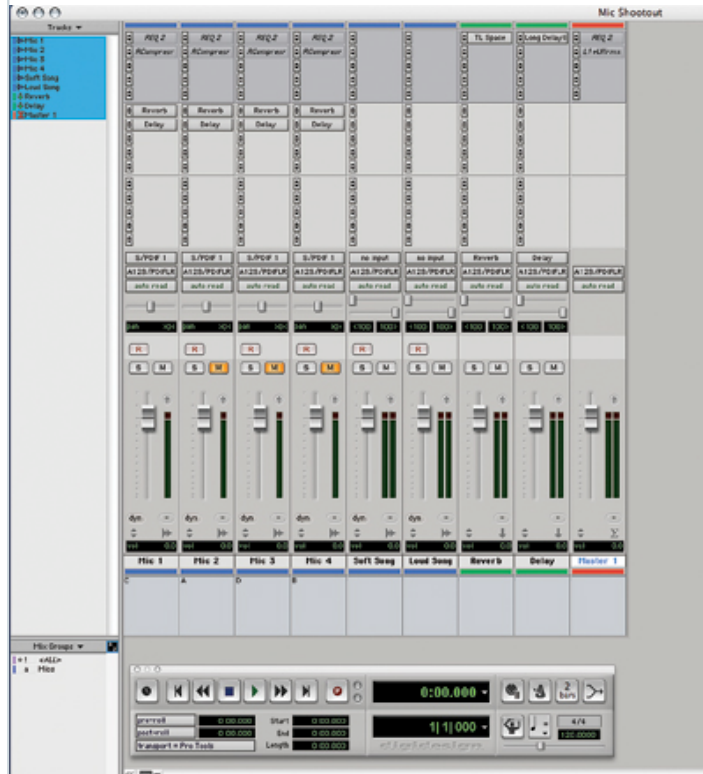


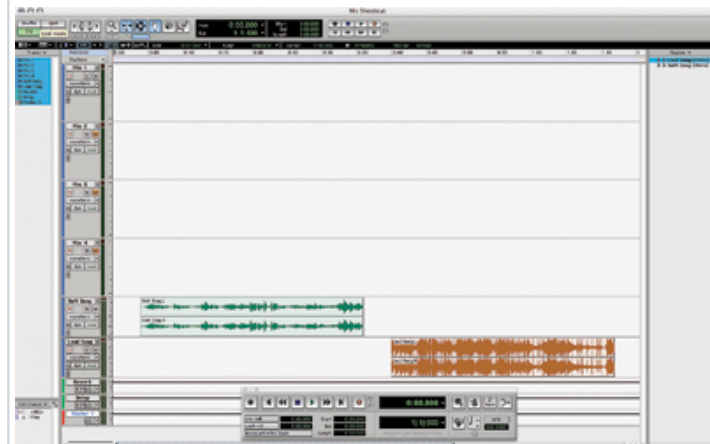
Doing Your Own Mic Shootout

By [Cliff Goldmacher](#)

As different microphones typically accentuate specific frequencies, there is no one microphone that is right for everyone. For example, if your vocal tone is already fairly dark, you should avoid mics that have a reputation for being a bit less bright. Conversely, if you have an edgy or bright sound, you'll probably want to stay away from mics known for shimmering top end. In the end, darkness or brightness in a vocal can be tamed or improved with EQ, but the goal in choosing the right vocal mic is to get the best signal possible into your DAW with the least amount of correction. If you've never taken the time to examine your voice for its specific qualities, there's nothing like a mic shootout to begin your education.



DAW Mix Window View (for the one that shows the faders).



DAW Edit Window view (for the one that shows the audio files).

GETTING THE MICS

If you live in a big music city—such as New York, Los Angeles, or Nashville— your best bet for getting your hands on a bunch of different mics is a studioequipment rental company. You can also hit up friends to lend you some of their favorite vocal mics, or work out some kind of a “test before buying” deal with your local music store. You should only need the mics for a day—which will keep your costs down at equipment rental places, and put the music store’s mind at ease.

RECORDING

Set up a session in your recording software with two stereo music tracks running one after the other with five seconds of silence between them. Selection One should be a 30-second snippet of music that works with a soft vocal approach, and Selection Two should be a track that demands a louder and more energetic performance. Then, set up a mono track for each microphone you are testing (don’t forget to label each track with the name of the mic used). The key here is to position the microphone in the exact place where you record the majority of your vocals. For example, if you record your own vocals in the control room while sitting next to your DAW, then that’s where you should set up each mic. In other words, do your best to recreate the actual situation you’ll be in when you record your vocal tracks. Now, doing your best to sing each track identically, perform the same soft and loud passages on each mic. Keep your input levels and gain settings the same for each “contestant.” Also, take care not to overload or distort the input signal. A good way to do this is to ensure the loud passage on the first mic is well below overloading the mic preamp or your recording software.

CRITICAL LISTENING

At this stage, you’re going to need some help. Have a friend assign a letter to each of the mics without telling you which letter goes with which mic (he or she can write this in the comments box in the session software). Then, play back the vocal test tracks, and unmute one channel at a time in random order. After being told the letter designating the mic you’re hearing, take notes on the sound of the vocal during the soft and loud passages. Which mic is more accurate? Which is more pleasing? Does a particular mic make your voice jump right out of the speakers? Also, ask your friend which mic he or she thinks is the best for your voice. (Getting a second opinion is never a bad idea.) Hopefully, with repeated listens, it will become clear which mic does the best job for your voice.

WHO WON?

A clear winner is a clear winner—go buy it! However, if the results you’re getting from two different mics are very similar, you can always base your purchase decision on factors such as the price of the mic or available features (includes pop screen, shockmount, pads, multiple polar patterns, etc.). Remember, it’s not always the most expensive mic that will sound best on your vocal. Quite simply, the mic that sounds best on your vocal is the mic that sounds best on your vocal.

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