

How to Get Cool Audio Gear Really Cheap and Add a Unique Angle to Your Studio Collection

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People have been telling me for years now that bargains in the audio world just can't be found. They say stuff like; "you're not going to find a Neuman mic for under 5 grand" and "you may as well give up looking for anything, all the good stuff is gone". These people can be quite discouraging. But I haven't stopped looking, and I've found enough stuff to keep my friends' and my studios brimming with some very interesting and useful gear.

Call me paranoid, but I view music chain stores as the enemy of the recording studio. If I had purchased all of my equipment from these stores I would never have been able to open my studio. The prices are outrageous! I rarely step into these establishments except to buy a reel of tape or to find out how much everybody else is paying for something I just found in a trash dumpster. I don't talk to the store personnel because they often take the attitude "if I haven't heard of it, it can't be good" or "why do you insist on wasting my time with this outdated technology?" Then they want to tell me that what I *really need* is the newest blah-blah self-powered computer-controlled remote access flapadapa chug ploop. No thanks.

Over the years I've developed a few tried-n-true tactics for hunting-down used gear. By buying equipment from friends, schools and businesses and snooping around back rooms and storage areas, I've been able to learn a lot about mic pre's, compressors, eq's, tape machines and much more. I trade or sell equipment I don't need to get the things I really want. If I take a look at the stuff filling my studio and home, I can't believe I own it all! Especially when I thought I'd never be able to afford even a single compressor or mic when I saw the prices of equipment in mail order catalogs and stores.

I once found a metal box containing seven rare Shure Brothers ribbon microphones for \$15 at a yard sale. From a radio station I got an awesome Canadian stereo compressor called an Orange County for well below its market value. Simply keeping your eyes wide open is a great way to get extra mike cables, mic stands, headphones and other peripherals that can cost big bucks elsewhere.

Whatever you might need for your studio, be it a mic or a reverb, it may be sitting on a shelf waiting for you in a radio station or college music library. Here's one method of finding older equipment that you could give a try. It has worked for me on more than one occasion.

Go through the phone book and call local commercial or college radio stations and ask for the chief engineer. Ask them if they have any old equipment you can buy, and mention that you will even consider purchasing broken equipment. That will start up a conversation and get things rolling. Tell them what you want, and be specific, if you are too vague they get antsy and end the conversation before you can get your foot in the door. Tell them that you are a recording enthusiast and are into the "old-style" of recording. Lots of radio station engineers appreciate that kind of thing. If they are receptive to the idea of you buying their old stuff, make an appointment or lunch date to go over and see it. (You can bribe 'em with a meal, a trick that works well with most audio-types!) Once you're in the equipment room, you can peek into the corners and find the really cool shit! The unexpected discovery of something everyone else has overlooked is my favorite part.

Making an offer can be a little tricky. You want to get the stuff cheaply, but you don't want to piss off the seller or ruin the possibility of future deals. If you don't know how much to offer for something you see, you can find prices for a lot of odd pieces in Pro Audio Marketplace. It's a magazine that lists audio equipment for sale or trade. (It's on the web at <http://www.Proaudiomarketplace.com>.) You don't have to buy anything that day; you can call back later. But beware; if you wait too long it might be gone. I have a couple of regrets because I missed-out on something good when I didn't jump on the deal.

Hopefully you can get a compressor or other piece of gear that's worth much more than the \$10, \$50, or \$100 you paid for it. You may be lucky and find a well-known collectable item or just a box that you can drive a signal through for a cool distortion sound.

P.S. I probably shouldn't be telling you all of this because nothing will be left for me, but I've been lucky so I shouldn't be greedy. If you come across anything you want to trade or just ask me about, you can email me at TUBEGUY@USA.NET.

Darron Burke lives in Boston MA and has been recording bands for 8 years since his personal studio grew large enough to support him. Some clients include: Gigolo Aunts, Elevator Drops, Deluxx Folk Implosion, Mary Timony, Small Factory, Sugar Plant and the Damn Personals.