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## THE TWANG!

### *Amps & Beyond (Pt.2)*

Steely Dan legend **Elliott Randall** further explores the alternative options for guitar amplification

**R**ounding out last month's column on alternatives to conventional guitar amplification (read 'old-school'), let's look at a few more options. First up, the Red Box output, a speaker cab alternative. I have several devices that offer 'Red Box ambience emulation'. In plain English, what that means is that, thanks to some very clever engineering, the final output stage of the given device sounds as though it is being run through a warm cabinet and mic'd with an SM57 (or two, in the case of stereo)... and it's really convincing. I have Red Box Out on my Hughes & Kettner amplifiers and also on my TC Nova System multi-effects pedal. It's a great solution for recording direct into your DAW's AD/DA converters, and keeping that 'amp' sound real.

I recently got my hands on the new Supro Tremolo Pedal. Here's part of the deal: a good number of amp designers I know concur that having a tremolo circuit in the amplifier design degrades the sound a little, even when the trem is turned off. Three of the four amps in my studio don't have tremolo circuits built in, so the effect needs to come from an outside source. Enter the Supro pedal. My initial impressions are: a) great sturdy build; b) accepts nine-volt battery as well as external power supply; and c) most importantly – it sounds fantastic. There are two distinctly different tremolo modes, both delivering delightful warmth. And if you want to overdrive the sound, there's a separate 'gain' control to give you a bit of amp crunch if so desired.

#### Using Your Mics Masterfully

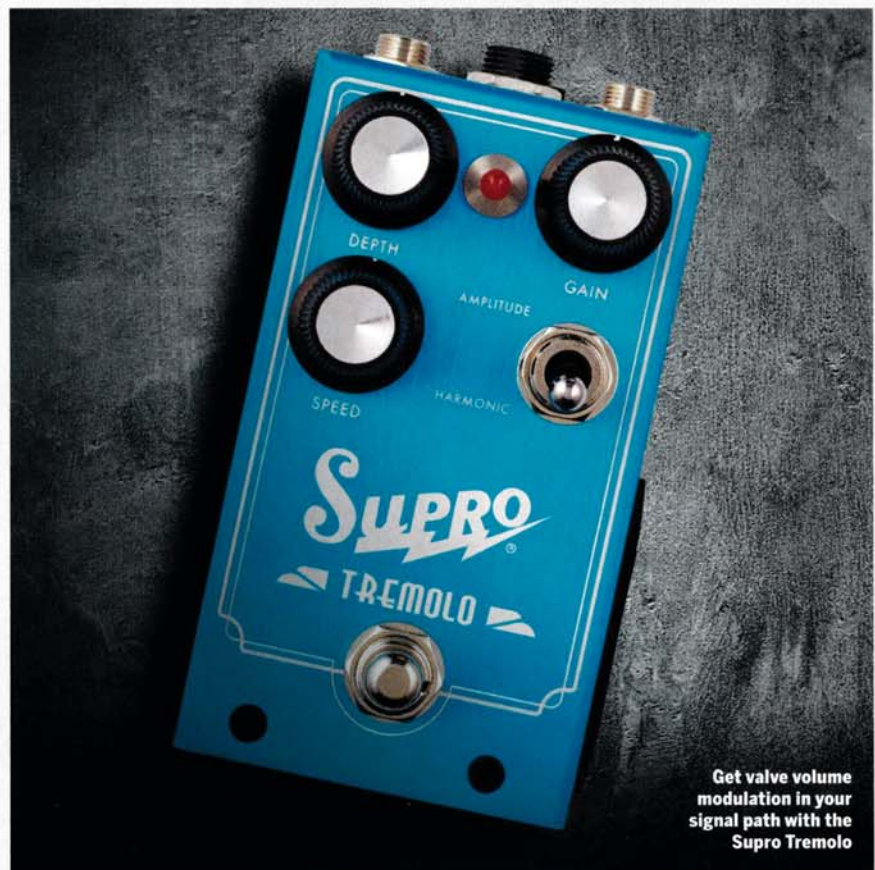
So if you're going to go the old-school way and mic up an amp, there are a few things you'll want to consider. You can achieve a great guitar sound using a simple and inexpensive Shure SM57. It has been a primary go-to mic for engineers for decades – and for a good reason. It can take a beating at ultra-loud volumes and deliver all the frequencies that most will want to hear. A slightly different flavour can be had with a Sennheiser 421. While the tone is slightly different, it, too, is pretty indestructible and works well at high volume.

Some engineers prefer using two microphones, for example, Tony Platt's use of a pair of Neumann U 67s – that's what made for the signature sounds on AC/DC's *Back In Black*. Then there's Wes Maebe's technique of using an SM57 coupled with a richer-sounding condenser mic – three of his choices for this task are the Advanced Audio CM49se, the Brauner Valvet, and the Beesneez Jade. Then you'll find engineers who employ a third mic, placed to capture the sound of the room. Frankly, unless the room itself has exquisite qualities, I'll skip that, since you can create virtually any room ambience with a good reverberation unit or plug-in. For me, the perfect example of a less conventional and brilliant job of one-mic recording was

the way Roger Nichols recorded my solos on Steely Dan's *Reelin' In The Years*. Given the sheer amplitude coming off those speakers, he decided to use an AKG 414 EB, and placed it a foot or two away from the sound source, and only about six inches off the floor. This 'sweet spot' was no accident. Roger spent about five minutes slowly walking around the amp, meticulously finding that spot. It's a great technique to adopt.

So now we've gone over a bunch of different options for your playing and recording pleasure. Which is the best? As I typed recently into a Facebook guitar thread: "Whatever floats yer boat."

Stay tuned for something completely different. See you in a month...



Get valve volume modulation in your signal path with the Supro Tremolo