

The Tunnel of Doom

An urban recording legend that originated at the Hit Factory migrated over to RCA Studios, where it was taken to new heights of excess. The original trick involved a Neumann U 47 FET at the end of a 10-foot pipe attached to the front of a bass drum. The natural delay and comb filtration picked up by the FET 47 at the end of the tube, mixed with a Sennheiser MD 421 capturing the beater impact inside the drum, resulted in a huge, complex kick sound.

Pushing the Envelope

At RCA, the massive maintenance shop included workbenches for its crew of electrical engineers as well as a staging area sizable enough to accommodate multiple large-format console rebuilds. Adjacent to this was an enormous storage room where one could find odd and sundry items such as sheet metal, miles of cabling on reels, and conduit of various materials and dimensions.

It was this last category that interested the young Turks, especially upon uncovering a cache of 22-inch-diameter commercial HVAC ducting that could be seamlessly gaff taped to a bass drum, effectively transforming it into a 12-foot-long cannon. New levels of sonic absurdity were attained by adding elbows and extensions to the basic rig. In one instance, the setup stretched out almost 30 feet. Given the considerable amount of track space required for the “tubular kick” sound to bloom, the practical limits of the technique were quickly identified for all recording projects not classified as “solo bass drum.” As you would expect, the technique was employed with varying levels of success on other sources, with electric guitars, background vocals, and even a tenor sax recorded through the “tunnel of doom” actually ending up on major label releases.



The Porcelain Parabolic

Another Hit Factory legend was born when a staff engineer ran out of isolation booths in Studio A. The room's two iso booths were occupied by the band's keyboardist on the studio's Yamaha C7 grand and the lead singer, attempting to strike gold with his scratch vocal so he could fly home to London in time for the holidays. Where to put the guitarist's Marshall cab? Although baffling it off in the studio would have been the traditional solution, the protocol for this project was squeaky-clean tracks, so the drummer ended up being the only occupant in the tracking room. Long story short, the 4x12 cabinet ended up in the ladies' lounge, chosen for the balanced reflectivity of its marble walls and floor. Eight mics were set up in there, including a Neumann U 87 with the pad engaged, set to omni, and suspended in the toilet about an inch above the waterline. The sound pressure level inside the room was lethal. The porcelain bowl acted as a parabolic reflector, focusing the sound and bombarding all 360 degrees of the mic's omnidirectional polar pattern. This technique was ported over to RCA, where it involved, at one time or another, every restroom (and even a rectangular slop sink in a maintenance closet) within a feasible cable run of the studios. The outrageous guitar sound made it onto quite a few albums.