

View from the basement
Addendum 6: Wind Instrument Mic Techniques

This is something I know absolutely nothing about. A big thanks to "Tim" from Georgia for this information :

Here's the deal on micing horns from my experience. Micing a brass instrument is easy. All the sound on a brass instrument is coming from the bell. However with woodwinds the sound comes from all the tone holes. If you put the mic at the bell on a saxophone you'll get a decent sound because it picks up most of the vibrations. The whole instrument is vibrating as well as the reed. But with a straight instrument like soprano sax, straight alto/tenor, flute, clarinet, even recorder, it's a tad harder because there is no curve. Thus the sound from the toneholes doesn't pass by the bell. So most of these musicians have to have two mics to get a true tone from the speaker. This is one thing the average sound guy doesn't get and a never ending source of frustration for those of us who play those instruments. Another problem we get from the sound guys is where we fit in the mix. Because we are an acoustic instrument and we don't play rhythm parts, what we need to play needs to be mixed on the same levels as the vocals live. It may be different in the studio. I haven't really done enough studio work to know. Well, the sound guys tend to mix us below or with the rhythm section. Try playing a lead clarinet part when you're not getting enough volume in the mix. You have to blow your balls off! Anyway, what I've done in the past is borrow my friend's boom when we record and set the mic on the same level but a tad away from my horn. This way it picks up the full sound. The only problem is I'm having to continually adjust the thing when I change instruments or want to move to reach something like other instruments or a pedal. So if we're recording you get the sound of the mic being moved or the sound of it clipping off while I move it. Not good. I've always tried less conventional things like taping the mic to a high chair. It just never picked up my sound right and didn't give me much flexibility if I wanted to move the mic for vocals or rap or an instrument that required the mic to be close like flute or recorder. So that's basically where I'm at now. I'm debating between wireless instrumental mics (they start at three hundred and the really nice ones are nearly a thousand. I don't have that kind of money for a mic) and the less convenient wired mic with a stand. Also the wired mics I do have are kind of crappy but with a delay pedal, I'm able to get a decent enough sound.