

# AG TRADE

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Great Acoustics  
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Mabel, a slender beauty...

SHOPTALK

## Now Hear This

Ear Trumpet Labs, the mic company of choice for a new generation of bluegrass players, releases a new studio model. Meet Mabel . . .

BY DAVID KNOWLES

Over the last three years, **Ear Trumpet Labs'** distinctive microphones have become the new gold standard among Americana and bluegrass guitarists.

With throwback female names like Edwina, Doreen, and Myrtle, the retro-styled live mics are used on stage by such noted acts as the **Milk Carton Kids**, **Tom Brosseau**, and **Della Mae**. Now, the Portland, Oregon, company has unveiled Mabel, a studio version of the line priced at a respectable \$1,000 (MSRP).

"The biggest difference is the multi-pattern capability," Ear Trumpet Labs founder **Philip Graham** says. "There's also higher output."

Almost immediately after releasing his first microphone in 2011, Graham was asked whether he could come up with a high-quality studio version.

"It was requested from musicians and engineers," he says. "People were asking for a multi-patterned mic to do figure-eight recording. It was something I'd considered myself, so I started looking into it."

With the addition of Mabel, the company now has nine different microphones that it makes by hand out of copper plumbing supplies and vintage bicycle parts. To be sure, Ear Trumpet Labs is a boutique operation, selling

just over 200 microphones in 2013, but it is on track to double that figure in 2014. "The biggest way people find out about them is they see someone using one of the mics somewhere and usually ask them, 'What the hell was that? It sounds great!'" Graham says. "I hear from a lot of the musicians that have my mics who say that it's pretty regular for three or four people per gig come up to them and ask about them."

Graham began building mics, in part, to try and optimize the guitar and vocal sounds for his daughter, singer-songwriter **Malachi Graham**.

"My impetus for getting into this was home recording," Graham says. "I was doing different kinds of DIY electronics, building guitar amps and circuitry, building a compressor. When I started researching microphones I realized how expensive they were and wondered, since I was in a DIY frame of mind, whether it was possible to build your own."

By 2011, he had refined his design, and opened Ear Trumpet Labs.

"Many of our customers come from the bluegrass and Americana genres," Graham says. "In some cases, the mics are specifically designed for the kind of bluegrass and full band single mic-ing—the Louise and the Josephine, for instance, that's specifically what their strength is."

One happy customer is **Della Mae** flatpicker **Courtney Hartman**. "I was on the lookout for the perfect large diaphragm mic to use live with Della Mae when a friend told me about Ear Trumpet Labs," she says. "We loved the Edwina from the first show and now tour with five of their microphones. They've given us the freedom of large diaphragm microphones while maintaining tone clarity and a high-feedback resistance."

With Mabel, Graham hopes to go toe-to-toe with microphones that cost more than five times what Ear Trumpet Labs is charging. Still, he's content to grow his business slowly.

"I don't ever want to take the company to a point where I would have to have to consider the margins and cost cutting to mass produce these mics," Graham says. "My whole intention is to have it be a workshop. I do want to get bigger, and I've got a couple of guys helping me out now, but the idea is to keep it a craft workshop, and to get people in who are interested in working like I am and do it all by hand with that attention to detail." **AG**