

# THE HOLE TRUTH

✧ Acoustic Gear In Review ✧

**LORD OF THE STRINGS:**  
Dean Markley's Trilogy  
Pickup system



## TRIPLE PLAY

Dean Markley Trilogy #3103  
Three-in-One Performance pickup

By **Emile Menasché**

**F**REEDOM OF CHOICE may be an inalienable right, but it can be as much a curse as a blessing. Take acoustic guitar pickups: not only does the market offer a mind-boggling abundance of models but we are faced with three varieties—under-the-saddle piezo transducer, magnetic, and guitar mounted microphone—each of which has inherent advantages and disadvantages.

The good news is that these pickup types, when configured properly, can complement one another, with one design compensating for deficiencies in another. Dual-variety designs have gained popularity over the years, but the Dean Markley Trilogy pushes the envelope by melding each of these major technologies into one well integrated system.

### The Basics

The Trilogy consists of an under-the-saddle transducer element and a soundhole pickup assembly that houses a single-coil magnetic pickup, condenser microphone and preamp circuitry and controls.

The Trilogy isn't difficult to install, but doing so requires a drill, a steady hand and the ability to follow diagram-free instructions. The job is much easier if you're just replacing an existing pickup (as I did on my Larrivée C-03) rather than starting from scratch. Be warned, though: you'll have to reach deep into your guitar and drill a couple of holes, and get correct measure-

ments in the process.

The output jack and transducer connect with special cables that are hard wired to the pickup assembly, which fastens to the guitar with screw-in-clamps. This setup makes it easy to remove the pickup assembly and move it to another guitar—provided that it too has the piezo and input jack installed. Dean Markley recommends positioning the pickup as high up the soundhole as possible. Note that in some positions the controls may scrape the wood, so be sure to provide a little clearance.

The pickup assembly houses four volume controls: one for each pickup, and a master. The controls are unobtrusive but accessible, and they're tight enough that you won't turn them accidentally when picking near the soundhole.

### The Pickups

Each of the Trilogy's pickups has a distinct sound. The under-the-saddle transducer is among the warmest I've heard, with a nice, woody quality that doesn't suffer from the typical bridge pickup's strident stringiness.

The single-coil magnetic pickup sports adjustable pole pieces and has a clear, bright sound that balances nicely against the piezo. On its own, it's warm enough for jazzy solos; when blended with the piezo and mic, it provides the bulk of the body.

The mic's sound is less straightforward. Of the three pickups, it will be the most affected by your guitar's tone and design. For instance, it echoed the sonic peaks and

valleys inherent in my Larrivée, which made the mic ineffective on its own. Still, when mixed judiciously with the other pickups, the mic added depth, warmth and dimension to the guitar's sound. In the studio, it will help a D.I. acoustic-guitar recording sound much more natural. In performance situations, the mic is prone to feedback, but set levels carefully and compensate with the EQ as needed, and you should be fine.

### The Blend

A good blend is the key to the Trilogy's sound. Interestingly, despite the absence of an onboard EQ, this is one of the most versatile pickup systems I've heard. Each pickup emphasizes a different part of the guitar's character, allowing you to play with a full range of techniques and have each shine through by adjusting the mix to meet your immediate needs. Finding the right combination for a particular instrument and application can take experimentation, but the results are worth it. I was most impressed by how natural the guitar sounded when I strummed it hard with a flat pick, an act that typically reveals an acoustic pickup's inherent weaknesses. The Trilogy was equally capable of handling hard thumb snaps and subtle, fingerpicked lines.

### The Bottom Line

Blending the best of three popular acoustic mic technologies, the Dean Markley Trilogy delivers natural acoustic tone in a system that is flexible enough for every musical style. This Trilogy has a nice ring to it. ■

### KA-CHING!

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