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CPM Reviews: Audix Micros Condenser Microphones

by Loren Alldrin

With large-diaphragm condenser microphones growing cheaper and more common every day, many live sound engineers believe the "holy grail" of studio-quality sound is found only in these mics. What they don't realize is that small-diaphragm condenser mics can actually offer advantages over their large-diaphragm brethren. Small-diaphragm condenser mics generally offer better high-frequency extension, less coloration off-axis, and a smoother overall frequency response. Add to this the fact that smaller mics are easier to position and less visually intrusive, and it becomes apparent that the small-diaphragm condenser mic is far from obsolete.

Audix believes in the usefulness of small-diaphragm condenser mics, and their expansive Micros line is proof. The Micros' miniaturized integrated preamplifier makes it the smallest self-contained mic available, and no external interface or power supply is required. All you need is the supplied mini-XLR-to-XLR cable and phantom power.

At the heart of the Micros system are two compact microphone bodies, which can be purchased with one of several different capsules to control pick-up pattern. The smaller of the two bodies is just 1.7 inches in length, not much larger than one AAA battery; it delivers a bass response down to 80 Hz. The larger body is 3.5 inches in length and has a bass response down to 40 Hz.

Capsule options include cardioid or hypercardioid for the ultra-compact M1245, and omnidirectional, cardioid, hypercardioid, or supercardioid for the larger M1290. All capsules use the same 12mm gold vapor diaphragm that delivers high-frequency response to 20 kHz and respectable sensitivity and noise specs.

As impressive as the range of Micros body and capsule options is, equally impressive is the broad assortment of mounting hardware available for the line. Audix offers mounts and stands to strategically position a Micros mic in front of almost any sound source. Flexible podium stands, drum mounts, clamps, mini shock-mounts, hanging cable mounts-they're all here. A classy 50-inch carbon fiber boom is a great option for churches, as it allows the mic to be placed at head level in front of a choir without

obstructing sight lines. I can't imagine not being able to get a Micros mic where you need it with all these mounting options available.

Small Mic, Big Sound

Once you get a Micros mic in place, it will reward you with a sound much larger and more flattering than you might expect from such a small microphone. The Micros' sound is both accurate and detailed, with plenty of "air" and sparkle. The Micros have excellent mid-range and upper-midrange accuracy, something I value highly in any mic.

Both mics have a somewhat understated bass and low-mid response, which isn't necessarily a drawback for live sound. In most venues, low frequencies from a mic are more foe than friend. I found the Micros to naturally produce the "cleaned-up" sound that I normally have to use EQ to achieve. The M1245's 80 Hz bass roll off is rarely a liability, since mic channels often have a high-pass filter applied at 80 Hz or even higher.

I tested the Micros mics on a number of different instruments in both live and studio settings. My first test was to use the M1245 (on the 50-inch boom) to mic the high strings of a piano. The M1245's sound was clear and natural, a definite improvement over the small-diaphragm condenser mic it replaced. Next, I swapped the M1245 for an M1290 taped to the underside of the closed piano lid. This turned the piano lid into a huge boundary microphone, and the resulting sound was even better.

Next was a children's choir, whose low volume always makes it a challenge to get enough gain before feedback. The M1290 performed wonderfully, giving more gain than previous mics and capturing a crisp, intelligible sound. The kid's voices sat nicely on top of the backing track without even a touch of EQ. Not having a large, imposing mic obscuring their little faces was a real plus.

The M1290 was put through its paces in the studio, recording acoustic guitar, backing vocals, and percussion. It performed well on vocals and percussion, capturing a detailed, up-front sound. On acoustic guitar, however, the mic's generous top-end response proved to be a bit too bright. The same "zing" that makes the Micros cut through the mix in a live setting can prove excessive in the unforgiving world of recording.

Take It to Church

There are many applications for the Micros in houses of worship. This versatile little microphone will excel on choirs, strings, percussion, piano, drums, and more. Clip a pair of Micros to the top of a Plexiglas drum tank for overheads. Hang them over the congregation for ambience mic'ing. Conceal them in strategic places to pick up sound effects or dialog for a drama. Use a Micros on the 50-inch boom for scripture readings or prayer.

About the only places a Micros won't put in a great showing is on solo vocals, instruments that are already very bright (i.e. brass), or instruments from which you need a lot of deep bass (i.e. the M1245 on a bass guitar cabinet).

Everywhere else, this little mic will likely impress you in a big way. The Micros M1245 carries an MSRP of \$379, and the M1290 an MSRP of \$399. Also available is a 50-inch carbon fiber boom stand.

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