

AUDIX VX-10

VOCAL CONDENSER MICROPHONE

Over the past few years, Audix has emerged as a serious player in the field of live performance mics. The company's latest offering is the VX-10, a \$599 cardioid model with a screw-on, field-replaceable, true condenser capsule in a body based on the same form factor as its familiar OM Series of dynamic mics.

I auditioned this model for use on Joni Mitchell's Both Sides Now tour. We were looking for the most natural-sounding vocal microphone on the market, because on the tour, as on the album, Mitchell is backed by a 60-piece orchestra. There have been many condenser vocal mics introduced in the past few years; we searched through dozens of models, so it took some time.

Most condenser vocal mics have an unnatural presence peak between eight and 11 kHz that is annoying to singer and listener alike. Many also have a proximity effect that clouds the response in the midrange. Some condensers use an electret design allowing operation on phantom power voltages below 48 volts, but many of these have an artificial sound that doesn't work as well for featured instruments or vocals. By the end of our auditions, only two other models were still in the running with the VX-10—a recent offering from Germany and a not-so-recent one from Japan—but the VX-10's open and transparent sound placed it ahead of those.

ON TOUR WITH JONI MITCHELL

The Mitchell tour proved the mic's strong points; it kept any leakage of the orchestra or floor monitors sounding as natural as the singer. The polar pattern seems tighter than what I would call cardioid, but, due to its smooth off-axis response, it is very forgiving. Mitchell's sultry, swaying vocal delivery is combined with four floor monitors and a 60-piece orchestra, so the mic had sound coming at it from all directions. Its smooth HF response eliminated the usual need for a de-esser. Low handling noise and a modest proximity effect make it a singer's dream come true. Our only objection was a slight excess of 800 Hz, which, given the mic's other strengths, was a simple shortcoming to fix with a tweak of the EQ.

AND WITH K. D. LANG

Moving on to k.d. lang's Invincible Summer tour immediately afterward, I wanted to use the VX-10 again. However, Ms. lang has a strong attachment for a legacy electret condenser that she's used her entire career, and she is very comfortable with its unique styling and steadily rising response. We did, however, put three VX-10s into play for background



and Windy Wagner, who especially enjoyed their sound because they were using in-ear monitors. The complicated three-part harmonies—a trademark of lang's production—are the second-loudest element in the mix. We were often asked what kind of effect was employed on them, when it was simply a stock Lexicon reverb.

The VX-10 offers 10 to 20 dB more output than most other condensers. This requires less gain at the mic preamp for a cleaner sound. The VX-10 also has a great deal of headroom, so that vocals—from a whisper to a scream—are reproduced cleanly. The most striking feature of the VX-10 is its natural, transparent sound quality. With sound engineers having to fight so many elements to get vocals to sit cleanly in the mix, this mic offers an edge that will make the most jaded live engineer sit up and listen. Don't take my word for it; compare one to your current favorite vocal condenser, either live or studio, and hear for yourself.

BRINGING IT BACK HOME

Although the VX-10 is intended for live sound, broadcast and recording users will also appreciate its sonic honesty and robust output level. Engineers may also find it serves a variety of applications other than vocals. Musicians looking for an all-purpose condenser mic that can be used both in the studio and on the road need look no further than the VX-10. A nice addition to any inventory, this microphone would never sit on the shelf for long.

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