

# Tape Op

## Gear

# Reviews

## M-Audio

### DMP3 Mic Pre and Duo Mic Pre/USB Audio Interfaces

Bucking the trend towards expensive, high-end mic-preamps, the folks at M-Audio have recently released two affordable models that caught my eye.

**DMP3 Mic Pre** First off, the *DMP3* dual mic pre (\$249 retail) is a straightforward, half-rack device that offers 2 independent channels and sports XLR mic and 1/4" instrument inputs, VU metering, phantom power, phase reversal switching (on both channels), Hi/Lo gain switch (allowing variable gain at ranges from +6 to either +36 or +66 dB), Lo cut @ 75 Hz, clip LED indicator and balanced line outputs. Beyond the retro look (the cool VU meters remind me of a PT Cruiser's dashboard) the *DMP3* has a smooth, present sound that might be expected from a more expensive preamp. Given that M-Audio proudly publishes the frequency response as falling between 20-100 kHz (+0/-1 dB), this small, lightweight box is definitely worth checking out as an alternative to buying all your budget on a mega-buck pre.

**Duo Mic Pre/USB Audio Interface** The *Duo* (\$349) is a bit of a different animal, in that it's both a 2 in x 2 out USB audio interface (PC/Mac) and a standalone pro-quality mic pre. As an interface, the *Duo* works at rates up to 24-bit/96 kHz, offers various +4/-10 dB level options for the line I/Os and has a "direct monitor" feature that can route the input directly to the monitor output (so as to eliminate latency delays that can be introduced by the computer and/or editing software). As a bonus, this multifunctional toolbox includes a pair of high-quality mic pres that offer XLR inputs, switchable phantom power, independent 20 dB pads and signal/clip LEDs. In its normal mode, the mic or line inputs are directly routed to the audio editing application's input, however, when the front panel "Stand Alone Mode" button is pressed, the *Duo* becomes a stand-alone mic pre that can be used without a computer. In addition to this, the amazing dynamic *Duo* can also be used as a standalone A/D converter, which lets you stream either the mic or line inputs through to its S/PDIF digital outputs at selectable rates of 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96 kHz! I also found that the *Duo* can be used as a handy-dandy "stand alone" headphone monitor amp. Basically, the term "*Duo*" doesn't do this little, half-rack box justice. You'd be hard pressed to find such a small, affordable tool that leaps through more hoops in a single bound than this one. (www.midiman.com) - David Miles Huber, www.modrec.com

## Stapes

### Omni Condenser Microphones

When I received these mics I was shocked at their size. They are built right into standard XLR connectors with a small brass tube coming out of the end. All told, these things are about 3 1/2" inches long and weigh little more than a Sharpie. I'm told that the design was inspired by a *Tape Op* article a few years back and utilize the same Panasonic electret mic elements, but that the electronics were improved for higher SPL, wider frequency response and phantom power. First trial, I put a pair on a piano up against a pair of vintage AKG C-12s, all run through channels on a Neve 8068 at RPM studio in NY. What we found was that the Stapes sounded great on the piano. Warm, even, very nice clarity on the bottom end and a crisp, but not quite hyped top end. The omni pattern made for a full sound, with a nice stereo image, though not as much separation as you would have with cardioid. Second trial was as a room mic on a guitar track. We put one about four feet away from an AC30. Some mics can tend to thin out in this position, but I was blown away by the Stapes, getting the best sounding "distant" guitar tone I've gotten out of any mic. It sounded huge. Back home, I put the mics through the paces as overheads on drums. I had been using Audio-Technica ATM33s or CAD E-100s as overheads for years, and had been very happy with them. I popped up the Stapes and once again I was blown away. Straight through the pres in a Mackie 8-bus board, they sounded amazing. Great cymbal tone without being too sizzly, with a nice evenness in the stereo image. I like the sweetness of the top-end of these mics. They're modern and clear sounding, but without the harshness that I sometimes get with overheads. Maybe it's the omni pattern that has something to do with it as well. The drums sounded full and punchy (I try to use overheads for more "drum" tone, than just cymbals). I also love the size and lightness of these mics, as I don't need any special mic stand to put these up. A spring-loaded clip is the only special requirement. No drooping boom stands. You can stick these things almost anywhere. Next, I tried one as a close mic on a guitar amp, and another as a room mic. I already stated that it has become my favorite distant mic, but it also shined right on the speaker. I've been using condensers on guitar speakers more and more lately, and I found the Stapes to be great on crunchy guitar track. I kept the mic about a foot in front of the speaker, slightly off-axis and got a fat and punchy direct tone, with a nice crisp attack (through a solid state pre) with just enough "air" around the sound so that I didn't need the room mic. I am thoroughly impressed with these mics. The only complaints that I may have about them are that with higher gain settings on the preamp (like on a distant source), I found that they got a bit noisy. I also didn't have great luck using them as a vocal mic. I did like them for a three-part backup vocal, but as a lead vocal mic, I never got the sound I was after. The only other complaint is that I don't have more of them. (www.stapesaudio.com) - Roger Lavallee

## Auralex Acoustics

### MoPads Monitor Stands

The *MoPads* are a set of 4 dense foam pads that fit under your studio monitors to isolate them from low end acoustic coupling that occurs all too frequently in studios. The pads go two to a speaker, one on each side, and since they provide a slightly downward-facing angle (towards the console) there are some triangle wedges provided to even out this angle, if desired. My speakers sit on a board that lays across two speaker stands, and the monitors (Dynaudio BM 6A) have sat on top of mouse pads to slightly decouple them. When I placed one of the monitors on *MoPads* instead, and fed the speakers mono source material which I could pan left and right, the first thing I noticed was that the *MoPad* speaker was slightly lighter in the low end due to the loss in coupling. Then I noticed that despite this fact it was easier to hear what was going on in the low end on that speaker, whereas the one without the pads was a bit muddy. I placed pads under both speakers and auditioned a bunch of CDs I had mixed. The downward angle of the pads actually helped line the speakers up better with my head, providing clearer imaging, though in some studios the speakers might end up pointing too far down. In this case you would add the provided wedges, though this would raise the speakers up over 1.5" from where they had been. A few people commented to me that Auralex was asking \$59.95 for a few pieces of foam, but the special, dense foam used in the *MoPads* isn't the same as the kind I find in acoustical treatments or in local "foam shops", plus I've seen these advertised for \$30 lately, not a bad price for this much sonic improvement!

(www.auralex.com) - LC

## Fostex

### T50RP Headphones

Most studios have pairs of T40RP headphones on hand for tracking. I've got three and have been using them constantly. The cups don't swivel all around like some headphones so they're easy to take on and off while playing guitar, the cables are easily replaceable with locking 1/8" plugs on the headphone end, and the rubber headband across the top keeps them from slipping off unless the drummer's hair is too greasy. The *T50RP* is the new big brother of the 40, with a slightly bigger earcup size and wider frequency response (claimed to be 15 Hz - 35 kHz!), but all the good features remain. In tracking use I found that these 'phones were a little less midrange than the 40 series, which sometimes was good and sometimes bad. One drummer claimed she couldn't hear as much through them as T40s or Sony MD 4506s, ironically probably due to the wider response and less harshness in the mids. I tracked some bass on these (along to live drums and guitar) and found that I was hearing the lows pretty well, which I liked. I also found the *T50RPs* good for checking mixes on, more like a pair of audiophile 'phones than the usual tracking headphones. Basically these headphones are great for certain situations, just be aware that they don't rock the mids like their little brother the 40RP. (\$199 list / \$99 retail if you look hard enough, www.fostex.com) - LC