Audix SCX-25

BY BOB EMMET

If a microphone delivered excellent fidelity, lightning-fast transient response, a very high output level and contained its own shockmount, could you forgive it for looking like a lollipop?

Audix is betting on it with their newest, er, confection: the SCX-25. Housed in a tiny body only four inches long, the mic is designed for applications of physically larger condenser models: lead and background vocals, choir, orchestral and acoustic instruments. Weighing in at only 7.8 ounces, the SCX-25 will fit in areas its larger cousins simply can't. The manufacturer has miniaturized the preamp electronics (all condenser mics contain preamps to bring the signal just up to nominal mic output) to fit within the slim, short housing. The 1" capsule is suspended within the wheel-shaped screened housing, eliminating the need for a shockmount and providing superb rejection of handling noise (nice job, Audix).

The SCX-25 is short on frills and fluff. There's no bass roll-off switch, no 10dB pad, no selectable polar patterns. You just plug it in to any console or preamp, provide it with 48-volt phantom power and it's ready to rock. It's shipped in a small foam-lined wooden case that contains a standard stand mount and a cutout for another mic (the SCX-25 is available in stereo pairs). A gold-plated male XLR connector at the base provides signal output. The machined brass construction feels solid and durable overall, although on our test model the mesh screen came slightly loose from the housing ring. Once you get past the odd shape, the mic looks and feels like the pro studio equipment it is meant to be.

SOUNDCHECK

The Gear:
Audix SCX-25 Studio Condenser Microphone

The Gigs:
Overdub sessions of instruments and vocals

Who It's For:
Pro and project studios

How Much:
$799

Pros:
- Small footprint
- Low handling noise
- Built-in shockmount
- Very clean sound

Cons:
Very sensitive at close proximity

Audix
9400 S.W. Barber Street
Wilsonville, OR 97070
Tel.: 503-682-6933
Fax: 503-682-7114
www.audixusa.com

The Gigs

I began testing the mic by recording live male R&B vocals in Carmen Grillo's home studio. Powered by an Audio Upgrades solid-state preamp, captured clarity and detail were superb in every way. Response to transients and peaks was instantaneous, and we both agreed the SCX-25 delivered the pure, open-air sound promised by the manufacturer. Low-frequency content was astonishingly clear and unmuddied. Although no frequency graph was supplied with this model, I'd guess there's a very slight upward EQ tilt around the 10k "airband" as is the case with much-loved vocal mics such as the Neumann U87 or TLM-103.

One word of caution: the mic's extreme sensitivity demands a bit of care in its application. With the condenser element roughly 1/4" from the mesh screen, care must be taken to maintain some distance from the mic to avoid nasty artifacts. A pop filter is an absolute necessity when singing into this product, and although Audix claims the element can handle an input of 138dB, we were able to slightly overload it with loud vocals. I'd think twice before sticking it in a kick drum. The cardioid response seemed gentle and wide, so drifting very slightly off mic (easy to do with such a small instrument) didn't really pose a problem. By the same token, there's very little proximity effect, so slight variations in mic distance didn't throw the frequency response off.

Next, I decided to try out the mic on acoustic guitar at home, recording my trusty Taylor 414. Initially, results were slightly disappointing compared to the mics I normally use for this purpose (Alesis AM30 or Neumann TLM 103). The instrument sounded phasey, thin and chorused. I moved the mic from the bridge to the 12th fret (admittedly the usual sweet spot on this instrument) and things were greatly improved. The sound was lighter and more delicate than that produced by the other mics and as a result, sat well in the mix. Fingerpicking parts were especially nice, with detailed pick attack and a nice balanced tone. Perhaps not as sonically accurate as the other mics, but quite flattering!

There'd been a rumor at *Gig* that this mic's true forte was in recording orchestral woodwind instruments, and I had a gut feeling from what I'd observed so far that this would be correct, so I brought the SCX-25 to a session I'd scheduled with a selective and sound-savvy flute player. Since it was a location recording, we didn't have a plethora of studio gear at our disposal; I had to record directly into a Roland VS-1680 workstation through its own preamps. After auditioning the Audix, we didn't even bother checking other mics. The sound was perfect, offering an ideal balance of tone and breath noise with minimal fingering and valve artifacts. The sound was big, rich and even in response throughout the flute's range. Even with the gentle acoustic output of a flute at a 6-12" mic distance, we were able to adequately drive the Roland preamp to an acceptable recording level with minimal amplified noise. [*Note: Although Bob didn't have a chance to test the SCX-25 on piano, engineers at Audix and other reviewers we've talked to say it's a perfect match.—Ed.*]

The Results

Everyone who used this mic fell in love with it, and it doesn't look like Audix will be getting this one back. The extreme sensitivity, small footprint and clever internal shockmount make it an ideal choice for location or handheld recording situations as well as a moderate-cost competitor to large-condenser standbys. There are a few tricks to working with the small footprint and highly exposed condenser design, but the majority of engineers who try this product will doubtless find plenty of uses for it. For woodwinds, acoustic instruments and softer vocal scenarios, the SCX-25 just may be one of the absolute best at any price. GIG