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RECORDING

The magazine for the record musician

SPECIAL ISSUE:

MICS!

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the Oktava 219/319
—No Soldering Required!



BY GENO PORFIDO

A few years ago it seemed like every audio manufacturer was developing low-cost mics that gave decent performance for the buck. A couple hundred dollars for a large-diaphragm condenser? That was great news for the home studio owner or the low-budget facility that was trying to offer quality sound at an affordable price.

Advances in technology and inexpensive overseas labor costs have opened the flood gates to affordable mics. There are literally dozens of shiny, large-bodied, metal-grilled 'vintage' style mics with hyped top end to choose from. Setting yourself apart from all of the clones can't be easy, but someone finally decided it was time to add something a little different to the mix.

That's where the KEL HM-1 comes in. In an attempt to offer engineers and recordists a slightly different flavor, the HM-1, the first mic marketed by KEL Audio out of Winnipeg, Canada, breaks the mold not only in sonic character but also in diaphragm and mic size.

Well, something different...

The HM-1 is a small-diaphragm cardioid condenser that uses a 0.5", 3-micron gold diaphragm housed in a 2" x 5" solid zinc die-cast casing. Right away the HM-1 stands out, with its smaller capsule size instead of the larger 1" gold-sputtered diaphragms that are found on most of the clones.

The HM-1 manual comes straight out and suggests that the smaller capsule size and sonic characteristics will not make the HM-1 your "go to" mic, especially with quiet sources. The smaller capsule in conjunction with the compact casing is better suited for warming up harsh or bright

instruments, or as an alternative to loading up a mix with multiple tracks that all exhibit the same crisp and potentially brittle top end.

The HM-1 is a side-address mic with a cardioid pickup pattern that helps keep unwanted frequencies from mushing up the source. At 180 degrees, for example, the mic exhibits good rejection of the low and high mid frequencies that can bleed through from a guitar or cymbals. The manual suggests that this is a plus,

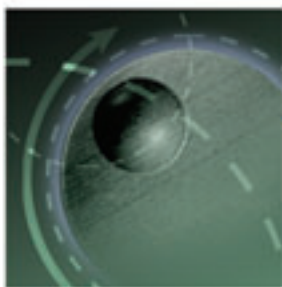
especially for the home studio that lacks acoustic treatment or isolation. The tight pattern rejects early reflections and can be helpful in situations where bad acoustics might cause trouble.

The mic comes with a nice sturdy clip that screws directly onto the mic casing and attaches to most common mic stands. Because of the mic's small size, it is a good choice for tight spots or where miking needs to be unobtrusive. Despite its size, the mic is no lightweight—rather it feels



Kel Audio HM-1

Not just an inexpensive mic—a truly different sound



review K e l A u d i o H M - 1

like it's strong enough to survive many years in the studio or on the road.

Frequency response for the HM-1 is listed as a respectable 30 Hz to 20 kHz. Each mic comes with its own frequency plot, useful when ordering a matched pair. Maximum sound pressure level is 134 dB with a signal-to-noise ratio of 76 dB. Self noise is 18 dBA due to the small capsule—not the quietest, but the mic wasn't designed with low noise as a priority.

Keeping it real

I received a matched pair of KEL HM-1s to try out for a few weeks. I checked the supplied frequency plots and the mics were very close, usually within a dB or so, at all test frequencies. General quality on the mics was very good although I did notice small rough spots on the finish of one mic, like small pitting. These are not meant to be showroom mics and the flaws were very minor, so it shouldn't be an issue unless looks mean more to you than sound.

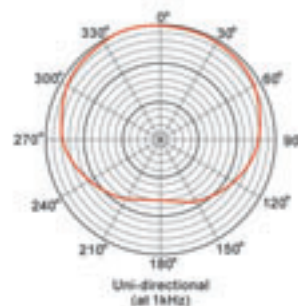
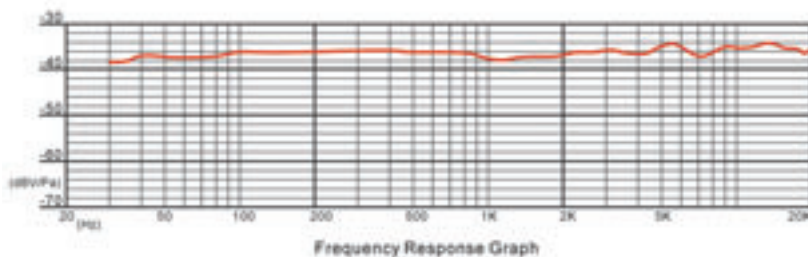
After reading the supplied product literature and manual, I was expecting a very dry and dull sound from the HM-1. I was surprised that the mics were actually fairly natural sounding as opposed to dark. Speaking into the HM-1 produced a nice natural

many of the tracks I recorded. Only about a dB or two, but dropping it back that little bit gave me the sound I was looking for.

I also found the HM-1's built-in pop suppression to be lacking. Even with a Popper Stopper device placed in front of either mic, I was experiencing noticeable plosives on vocals. Stepping back from the mic a couple of inches helps, but that intimate closeness gets sacrificed. The HM-1 is susceptible to proximity effect, so keep that in mind. This is not the mic of choice for that wonderful in-your-face vocal, but then again, it's not expected to be.

Breaking down the barriers

The KEL HM-1 has the opportunity to once again break down price-vs.-performance barriers. At a list price of \$99 each postpaid, with only a \$10 surcharge per mic for matched pairs (available on request), you will be hard pressed to find a better bargain.



sound without harsh sibilance or excessive low end. There was plenty of natural top end, enough to offer a very neutral sound on everything I recorded.

I recorded multiple vocal tracks with two different singers; a female with a middle-of-the-road voice, and a male whom I use on most of my mic tests because of his sibilance.

On the female vocal, the tracks sounded very flat—not *dark* really, just *flat*. Same for the male vocal. I was expecting a more colored, darker sound, but the HM-1 doesn't really muddy things up. It captures the source in a very flat and natural way.

I found this to be true on acoustic guitars as well. My Baby Taylor, which is an instrument against which I also measure many mics because of its small and slightly boxy tone, came back from tape sounding pretty much as it did in the room...very close to what I heard while playing, actually. A larger acoustic with lots of big bottom also came back flat-sounding. No hype, no harsh top and a fairly even bottom end. Just about everything I put the HM-1s to came back very neutral.

There is one tonal frequency range I did feel was more pronounced on everything I recorded: around 450—500 Hz. I found myself pulling back at about 500 with a medium tight bandwidth on

The HM-1 is sturdy, looks and feels well made, sounds good and does a nice job of capturing whatever you throw at it with a natural tone. It can be used on anything from vocals to percussion instruments with good quality. It is small enough to fit into tight spots, although the side-address capsule may limit placement where a top-address would find space.

For the price, it's really hard to overlook the HM-1. For the beginner, this is a great way to start a mic collection. For the pro, the Kel HM-1 offers an alternative to a world overcome with over-hyped mics.

KEL has more products to be released soon. I'm looking forward to them. ➡

Price: \$99 each, \$218 per matched pair (available on request)

More from: KEL Audio Inc., Box 26102, 676 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3G 3R3, Canada. 204/774-7167, www.kelaudio.com.

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Frequency response and polar pattern graphs courtesy KEL Audio.