

# MXL

## CUBE

### Microphone

By Garrett Haines

**M**XL has been a presence on the pro audio scene for a number of years. The company was originally known as a maker of entry-level recording mikes, meaning that if you needed something decent but didn't have a lot of money, you considered an MXL. About five years ago the company started introducing products that offered significant improvements in fidelity with only moderate price increases. For example, lower cost hook-up wire was replaced with cable from Mogami, one of the world's leading names in studio-grade wire. People started to take notice.

New designs came at a steady clip, each seemingly more impressive than the last. Today, more and more recording engineers rely on MXL products on a daily basis. That's why I jumped at the chance to review the new Cube as a tool for recording drums and percussion.

#### DETAILS

**FEATURES** Weighs less than a pound; 25mm gold-sputtered 6-micron-thick diaphragm set up in a fixed cardioid pattern; Mogami cable; low-noise FET (field-effect transistor) preamp with a balanced transformer-coupled output.

**LIST PRICE** \$199.99

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**COVERING  
ALL THE  
RIGHT  
ANGLES**

#### OUT OF THE BOX

One look at this microphone and you'll have no question as to how it got its name. It's a champagne-finished box-shaped device with a side-address element. Weighing just under a pound, it's sturdy while not being too heavy for most mike stands. Inside, the Cube holds a 25mm gold-sputtered 6-micron-thick diaphragm set up in a fixed cardioid pattern. Of course, the unit is wired with the aforementioned Mogami cable and features a low-noise FET (field-effect transistor) preamp with a balanced transformer-coupled output.

For use on a drum set, three applications instantly came to mind: overheads, toms, and outer kick mike. Except in super-low-volume situations or light brushwork, most recording engineers avoid condenser microphones on snares (yes, there are exceptions, but they are rare). Likewise, I didn't

use the Cube on hi-hats because I normally rely on overheads to pick them up.

#### OBSERVATIONS

MXL was kind enough to supply me with a pair of mikes for testing. The first thing I noticed was the two Cubes were pretty closely matched. This is useful in stereo situations where you want both mikes to respond similarly to the same frequencies. This helps reduce phase issues and provides a more accurate stereo image. With modern manufacturing techniques, it's more likely that any two mikes from the same model

line will work well in a stereo pair as there is more consistency from diaphragm to diaphragm.

As overhead mikes, the Cubes had a lot of upper-mid and top-end sizzle. The snare really cracked through and cymbals were very forward in the mix. After moving them around I found that placing them more toward the drummer's head and less toward the front of the kit/cymbal area gave a more balanced sound. Another good location was as a spaced pair behind the drummer's shoulders. Both mikes were pointed forward and slightly down. This gives a wider sound as the player's head





creates an acoustic void in the middle of the pick-up pattern. But it can be the right sound sometimes.

I also had good experiences using the Cube as a mono room mike. Sometimes recording engineers add room mikes in addition to the overheads. It can create a natural reverb or be used as an effect. It can also be blended at a lower level than the rest of the drum mikes to give the impression that the kit is larger than life. The Cube gave a balanced picture of the entire kit, both drums and cymbals, making it a good room-mike candidate.

### ON THE KICK

On the outer kick head I found the Cube could take a good bit of sound pressure without distorting. While some mikes do well directly in the front vent hole, the Cube liked being near the solid head. There was lots of snare, cymbal, and hi-hat bleed in this application, so be prepared to use a good bit of equalization if you

want to add the Cube as an outer kick mike. While the Cube worked fine in this application, I found I had to use more EQ than I do with other mike choices in this application, so I moved on to toms.

### ON THE TOMS

On floor and rack toms the Cube really scores. Having a fixed cardioid pattern mike is an asset when recording toms. Without going into a physics lecture, fixed-pattern cardioid microphones do a better job rejecting bleed than a comparable multi-pattern microphone set to a cardioid pattern. The reason has to do with the double diaphragms used in multi-pattern mikes. The rear diaphragm creates an acoustic shadow that affects the rejection properties of the front diaphragm.

Since it's side-address, placing the Cube is simplified. The included mike mount is effective in assisting with placement. And since an inch one way or another makes a

major difference in recording, ease of placement is very important to working engineers. The stubby body tends to stay out of the way of sticks, which should keep the Cubes in service longer than some of the competition. In terms of sonics, the Cube does a great job capturing what I like to call the "voice" of the toms. Both the head and the wood are well represented with equal amounts of lows, mids, and highs coming through. At mix-down, the toms pop, sing, and resonate, without any undue hype or exaggeration. In fact, for the reasons I've mentioned above, the engineers here at Treelady now use the MXL Cubes as their first-call rack and floor-tom mikes.

### WORD TO THE WISE

The only concern I had was that the Cube's cardioid pattern can be a touch on the wider side. For drum applications, this means you can get ride and other cymbal bleed if you fail to pay attention during set up.

Since the back of the mike is much less sensitive to higher frequencies, try to aim the Cube so the back or back-rear points at the cymbal and you should have no problems. ■

### VERDICT

The Cube is a nice buy no matter where you are in the recording food chain. If you're just starting out, a single Cube can do duty as a mono room mike, vocal mike, plus a lot more. If you have more means, a stereo pair can be great for room and overhead applications. Meanwhile, full-time engineers should have no hesitation relying on the Cubes for rack and floor toms. With great sound, ease of placement, and sturdy construction, the Cubes make a lot of engineering sense. But when you consider the street price is around \$99, they make even more financial sense! Give the Cubes a serious look the next time you're in the market for a condenser mike.