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REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Roswell Pro Audio Aurora Condenser Microphone

A new condenser mic with a prestigious sound well beyond its price

In our September 2015 issue, we took our first look at a brand-new, highly affordable microphone from a brand-new company. The microphone was the Mini K47 and the company was Roswell Pro Audio.

Despite being the new brand on the block, Roswell carries quite the pedigree; it's helmed by microphone expert, historian, and hot-rodder Matthew McGlynn. Matt is the man behind the Recording Hacks website (recordinghacks.com) with its extensive microphone database. He also runs Microphone Parts (microphone-parts.com), which is one of the top resources for microphone modding, DIY mic building, and upgraded replacement parts. The Roswell brand takes full advantage of Matt's expertise, his mods and hacks, and expands them into new models and designs that are exclusive to Roswell.

As my previous review attests, I am a huge fan of Roswell's first endeavor, the Mini K47. It has become one of my top recommendations for those who are looking for a quality microphone in the \$300 or less category. Since it offers its own sound with a nice touch of mid punch, I use it often on guitar cabinet, drum overheads, and percussion, despite having much more expensive mics in my locker to choose from.

With that in mind, I was more than curious to hear for myself what Roswell has cooked up for its newest product, the Aurora.

The Aurora

The Aurora is a large-diaphragm condenser microphone with a choice of cardioid and omni patterns and a 10 dB pad. Both switches are located on the front of the mic. The 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 2" body is made of brass in a black finish with the company logo and model painted in white. The mesh head basket is a brushed silver.

The body itself, while utilitarian and not dissimilar to many other import mics, is put together well; there are no cheapness or quality issues to worry about. It's a solid, heavy brass vs. many of the inexpensive aluminum tube-bodied imports.

The Aurora falls into the globally sourced hybrid-build category. The metal work is Asian sourced, as is the K67-style capsule, which features a 34mm center-terminated dual backplate design with a 3-micron thick membrane. The circuit board (a transformerless design) is designed and populated with quality capacitors and components in California, where the microphone is assembled, tuned and tested. The mic comes in a standard kit with a compact aluminum flight case, shock mount, and vinyl mic pouch.

The spec sheet includes a frequency range of 20 Hz to 16 kHz, a sensitivity of 45 mV/Pa, an impedance of 200 Ω , an 86 dBA signal-to-noise ratio, and less than 12 dBA equivalent noise.



Frequencywise it has a gently boosted low end from 20 to 100 Hz, a flat mid response to 1 kHz where it rises to a 1 to 2 dB bump from 3 to 4 kHz, followed by a wider, even 1 dB bump from 8 to 16 kHz, followed by a steep rolloff.

Sound

Unlike its 47-flavored sibling, the Aurora does not try to ape or clone any specific model of yesteryear. It is a very neutral sounding mic with a nice low end fullness and a well balanced, minimally forward top end. While it does not strive to be a U, C or E flavored mic, it does have a vintage vibe... I would call it more reminiscent of a '70s and '80s solid-state sound, from when condensers were made to be full, clean, and honest, vs. much of today's bright modern condenser fare.

Distilling the Aurora down to a handful of adjectives, I would call it full and well balanced. In cardioid mode the Aurora has a nice natural proximity effect that is full up close and then rolls off nicely at about 3". It combines well with the mic's good off-axis rejection. In omni mode the mic opens up with almost zero proximity effect. It also passes the omni mode spin test, sounding effectively the same all the way around the mic.

Being a larger mic with more body space, it has a bit more resonance when tapped compared to the tight-bodied Mini K47, but it is still more of a resonant thunk than a ringy ping.

In use

Due to its neutral fullness, the Aurora can be used on pretty much any source you choose with little concern or issues. Its smooth yet natural top end puts it squarely in the "this could be your only microphone and/or workhorse" category.

As with most large-diaphragm condensers, I spent most of my time with the Aurora in one of three places—acoustic guitar, drum overheads, and vocals. I also gave it a whirl on percussion and electric guitar cabinet as well.

On acoustic guitar, its controlled proximity effect at 3" or more makes it easy to place just off the soundhole for a full warm tone. One can also move it closer to the classic 12th fret position for a thinner, strumming folk sound that will sit nicely in a mix. The top end smoothness gives a great picture of the picked and strummed strings, but the 16 kHz rolloff keeps it from sounding too buzzy and metallic.

On drum overheads, it's a "great big picture" mic. The low end is forward enough to lend a gentle weight to the kick and floor tom, but not so much that it will fight with the close mics. Similar to acoustic guitar, the top end yields a good dimensional sound without taking your head off with extreme cymbal

heavy drummers. Again, it's a very late-'70s and '80s clean drum sound that is easy to blend in a mix with close miked toms and more.

The Aurora is a great all-rounder on both male and female voice, suitable for any style of music. However, be aware that it does lack the forceful mid push of a 47 flavored mic. As a result, I liked the Aurora better on vocal tracks that were the focal point of a mix vs. thick dense mixes where the vocals needed to cut and push through.

I had similar feelings when using the mic on guitar cabinet. The Aurora was my choice on minimal electric guitar tracks where one amp take provided the thrust and feel of the song, as opposed to a layered approach where multiple takes of layered electric guitar built up the songs.

I mentioned this as a good choice for "one and only" microphone; as a last comparison I used the Aurora in a side-by-side test with a Peluso P87 (review coming soon), my trusty Brauner Phantom Classic, and a Milab DC96B. Although only one of them is a direct inspired by/clone; each of said mics falls closer to the U87 school than they would a 47, 67, 12 or 251.

They all had their personal characteristics, such as the Phantom's ultra-detailed top end, the classic transformer-weighted weight of the P87, and the Milab's weighty yet rounded tone. What impressed me most was that the Aurora went toe to toe with them all in sound and character, so much so that there were times that all four mics were too close to call in a better-worse scenario. This is significant when you consider that the Aurora is the most affordable of the bunch and around half the price of the Brauner and the Milab. Now I am not arguing the German and Swedish craftsmanship of the mics, but strictly sound and character; this is one of those rare times I will utter the phrase "holds its own with mics twice its price."

Conclusions

I am not surprised in the least, given Matt McGlynn's background and passions, that the Roswell Pro Audio brand is off to a roaring start with stellar-sounding workhorse microphones in multiple flavors and price points that should make people stand up and take notice. The Aurora is a brilliant complement to the Mini K47 and a truly exceptional all-around mic. I can't wait to hear what Roswell has up its collective sleeve next. ➡

Price: \$749

More from: Roswell Pro Audio,
www.roswellproaudio.com