

DPA d:facto Interview Mic

The reporter mic has not, historically, been a hotspot for technical innovation.

NIGEL JOPSON encounters the exception.

The d:facto series has the look of a stage vocal microphone but beneath the casing lurks a dash of Danish precision manufacturing. The grille unscrews to reveal a small diaphragm condenser capsule shrouded by a removable — and washable — double density metal mesh basket (like a miniature version of the nylon pop-screens used for studio vocal recording). An internal foam covering in the ball head attenuates wind noise before it reaches the removable basket. The microphone *Resolution* tested was the wired P48 version with a standard handle; DPA also makes a range of screw-in d:facto adapters that operate with handheld wireless transmitters — microphone bodies — from Lectrosonics, Sennheiser, Shure, Sony and Wisycom. What DPA terms an adapter is actually an engineering tour-de-force, which puts the equivalent of the preamp from DPA's Reference Standard Series together with a powering circuit that takes the 5V from a typical wireless transmitter and steps it up to 48V to power the electronics. On the wired and wireless versions there's a 5mm rubber shock-grommet between the handle and the adapter/capsule mount.

With all this attention to isolation, it's not surprising the first characteristic I observed was a marked lack of handling and cable noise. It's necessary to deliberately bash the side of the microphone body before something like a normal handling sound is generated. Testing against several other round-grille mics with a fan, the DPA proved to be 12-15dB better than the average at wind isolation. Most audio pros have experienced how directional some omnis are at mid to high frequencies. With the d:facto Interview microphone, however, vocal tone shows almost no change when practising the typical 45° my-turn-your-turn reporter hand move. It's particularly noticeable when wearing headphones: it's possible to walk 360° around the DPA while speaking, and hear the voice frequency balance remain the same. Any sound under about 6kHz seems to maintain similar tonal characteristics whether on, or substantially off, the microphone axis. An interviewer controls the prominence of a speaker in a group with arm movement, but with the DPA you will get far less of the annoying muffling and comb filter effect during the arm swing, or in the moments when someone off-axis starts to comment.

The d:facto really excels when presented with a radical audio impulse to reproduce — massive dynamic range. When the building behind the reporter in a warzone collapses, or when the samba band in Rio suddenly double their drumbeats, it won't be this microphone that is found lacking. In fact, while challenging the mic with loud sounds, I realised how we tend to accept and expect a certain element of microphone distortion. We take it for granted that the normal microphones we use — many of them based on half-century old designs — do not reproduce

sound accurately. The d:facto shows up weakness in other parts of the signal chain. Using a microphone with the d:facto's dynamic quality presents a whole new set of challenges: sounds which would normally arrive 'pre-limited' — distorted by the microphone coil being pulled out of the magnetic field, or by the internal amplifier clipping — now arrive in their full dynamic glory. It's a testament to the low self-noise of the DPA design that messing about with plug-ins and bootstrap-style compressors later in the chain doesn't noticeably spoil the signal-to-noise ratio.

When I tested the d:facto with a snare drum, I felt the powerful results summed up all the tiny DPA engineering improvements in one big statement. Of course, the role of instrument mic is actually the métier of the Interview microphone's close cousin in the DPA range, the 2006A in the recording series. But the omnidirectional 2006V capsule in the Interview mic is based on DPA's original 2006 capsule, with sensitivity adjusted down 12dB to accommodate 'typical interview mic and wireless handle sensitivities'. Two opposite-facing miniature capsules are 'custom rebuilt' into a double diaphragm, one-capsule composition. This combines the advantages of small capsules (fast impulse response and wide frequency bandwidth) with the lower inherent noise possible from a larger diaphragm area. My snare test confirmed the Interview Microphone's strong suit: natural and extremely punchy dynamic performance through the mid-range. Other manufacturer's condenser mics in the same price band have similar open, lightly sweetened top end around 10kHz, but few can match the ability of the DPA to dynamically communicate mid-range power. Part of this is the robustly engineered design — sound handling is quoted at 160dB — but I'm also convinced that much of the natural sound quality is due to the DPA's very even polar frequency response, communicating a balanced feel from reflected as well as direct sounds.

The reporter mic has not, historically, been a hotspot for technical innovation. Unfortunately, we hear the results of this pretty much every time we watch TV. Detailed audio improvements such as a reduction in handling noise, or a balanced tonality without EQ, can make a huge difference to broadcast and location sound. DPA has scored several prominent evangelists for the supercardioid vocal version of this microphone — Sting, Stevie Wonder, Ellie Goulding, Paloma Faith (in a downpour of rain at the 2015 Brits) — and I'm sure the Interview Microphone will have a similarly good reception from broadcasters and sound contractors. It's the Rolls-Royce of reporter microphones. ■

PROS

Excellent dynamic range; even polar frequency response; reduced handling noise; good wind resistance; five-year warranty.

CONS

None; postprocessing needs to be adjusted to accommodate increased dynamic range.

Contact

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