

Audix Micro Series Drum Mics

Tiny, But Mighty

by Mark Parsons

Audix has released a new series of miniature condenser microphones that are especially well suited to miking drums and percussion. “Ho-hum,” you say, perhaps stifling a yawn. “Another clip-on mini drum mic?” Nope—not by a long shot.

Not Your Father’s Clip-On Drum Mic

Although at first glance the Audix Micros look pretty conventional, they’re actually groundbreaking. To begin with, when you look at the picture of the tiny mic, you’re looking at the whole thing. No additional power adaptor or electronic circuitry lives downstream, connected by a cable. And speaking of cables, the one on the Micros has a mini-XLR female at the mic end and a standard XLR male connector on the other. These two factors alone put these mics into a category of their own. According to Audix, they’re the world’s smallest condensers with an integrated preamp and detachable cable.

The Micros’ preamp circuitry is the same as that of the Audix SCX25A large-diaphragm studio condenser, which is quickly becoming an industry standard for professional recordings of pianos, drum overheads, acoustic guitars, and vocals.

Model Variations

There are three basic models in the Micro Series, and each is available in a few variations, depending

on polar pattern.

The M1245 is just under 1/2" in diameter by approximately 1 7/8" in length (roughly 12 mm by 45 mm, hence the name). It’s available in both cardioid and hypercardioid versions. The only visible differences between the two are the small symbols for either polar pattern, which are printed on the capsule in gray.

The M1290 is physically identical to the M1245, except that it’s twice as long. It’s available as a cardioid, hypercardioid, supercardioid, or omni. And it’s designed to have a little more extension on the bottom end. (Its stated response goes down to 40 Hz versus 80 Hz for the M1245.)

Both of these mics are fairly sensitive, yet they can take SPLs up to 138 dB. Then there’s the lower-output 1244, which can take up to 144 dB. It’s specifically designed for close-miking drums and other high-level sources. But for the model number engraved into the body, it’s identical to the M1245, and is available in cardioid or hypercardioid.

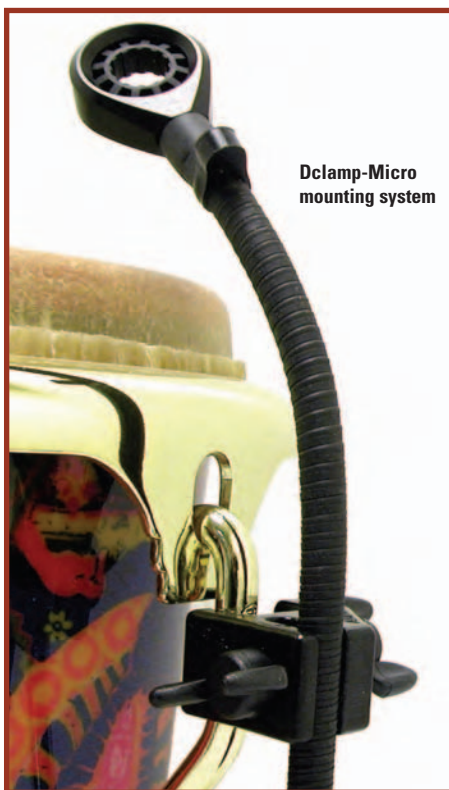
All the Micros share the same basic construction. They’re built on brass bodies, with a matte black finish that gives them an unobtrusive, professional appearance. The capsules are threaded onto the bodies, and they’re field-replaceable.

The 1245 comes in a nylon pouch; the 1290 comes in a wooden case. Both include a mic stand adaptor. The 1244—due to its designed application—comes with both the Dvice-Micro and Dclamp-Micro. The former consists of a quick and clever spring-loaded hoop clamp along with a gooseneck and miniature shock-mount, while the latter (also with gooseneck and shock-mount) lets you clamp the mic to the tension hook of a hand drum. Each Micro comes with a 12’ mini-XLR to standard XLR cable.

In Use

We tested the most drum-specific models in the Micro series: the M1244 (both cardioid and hypercardioid) and the M1290 cardioid. We used the 1290s with Audix’s new MicroBoom, which is an innovative ultra-light carbon-fiber mic boom with integrated connectors at each





Dclamp-Micro mounting system

We mounted the 1244 a few inches above the head, looking down at an angle over the hoop. The sound was clear, present, and natural, with a strong, realistic fundamental on the bottom and very good transients on top. Equally pleasing was what *wasn't* present in the sound. There was no artificial boominess on the lower end, as with some dynamics. Nor was there any harsh, splatty top end, as sometimes happens with small electret condensers. A typical small dynamic used in this application generally has a little more mid-bass boost, but suffers from a lack of articulation as compared to the 1244 (which had great clarity). Other mini condensers are occasionally lean on the bottom.

The little condenser's clarity and fidelity was made apparent by the bleed from the rest of the kit. As an example, the kick/snare/hat bleed from the 1244 when mounted on a tom sounded very natural and musical. (The off-axis response was linear, and the transient response was very good.) Since most mics on a drumkit will pick up the entire kit to some degree, this is an important attribute when it comes to creating an overall pro-quality sound.

The story was similar on a 16" tom. We got a very nice, clear, clean tone, with a strong-yet-natural fundamental and great stick attack. (And again, the quieter off-axis sounds—like the foot “chicks” from the hats—had a very “real” and high-fidelity sound to them.) Same thing on the snare: With the mic in close proximity to the drum, we not only got great reproduction of the snare rattle but also some good beef on the bottom.

At this point we mounted the 1244 on a conga using the Dclamp, which worked like a charm. Frankly, I thought there was

no way this tiny condenser could keep up with a good dynamic, which is my usual choice for this application. Well, the 1244 held its own, and then some. The Micro not only had great articulation as expected, it also yielded a nice, warm bottom end.

In a few test applications we compared the cardioid version of the 1244 to the hypercardioid version. The difference was subtle. With the hypercardioid capsule, the mic had a bit better rejection to the sides, primarily in the 60° to 120° off-axis region. Sonically, they're *very* close, so using both types on the same kit wouldn't make certain drums stand out or sound dissimilar. The hypercardioid version is just a hair leaner in the bass and lower mids, and maybe a tad brighter on top. Given these two factors, I might favor that version slightly on a snare drum (to keep out hat bleed), but it's a close call.

Sonic Booms

When it was time for overheads, we broke out the MicroBooms. The MicroBoom is a 50" long, ultra-slender ($\frac{1}{4}$ "-diameter) carbon-fiber mic boom that weighs only 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces. It has mini-XLR connectors at each end, which are connected to each other by a high-quality Mogami shielded cable that runs through the inside of the MicroBoom. A swiveling stand adaptor allows you to attach the MicroBoom to any mic stand, and the mic end of the boom has a short gooseneck integrated into it, allowing you better control over the mic position and angle. It's a very well-thought out design, and it provides a nearly invisible way to mount any Micro Series microphone almost anywhere.

Our review MicroBooms came with 1290 cardioids, which turned out to be an excellent choice. We attached the MicroBooms to a pair of standard mic stands and positioned the mics over the drumset as a closely spaced but not quite coincident pair, angled away from each other for good separation. Then we placed an Audix D6 approximately 16" in front of the kick drum.

There was no tweaking of the placement. The whole thing took just a minute or two. Then we recorded a few minutes of groove, just to check that the levels were close before we did more serious testing. Well, *stop right there.*

end. (More about it later.)

As we tested the Micros on various parts of the drumset, we occasionally ran them next to other mics that are often used in similar applications. Except for overhead applications, these were typically dynamic mics.

We started with the 1244 (cardioid), mounted to a 12" tom via the Dvice-Micro. This clamp made attaching the mic to the drum a snap. The spring-loaded jaws hook over the drum hoop, and you're there. The grip isn't as vice-like as a mount that has to be hand-tightened for each drum, but all of the Dvices held well throughout the review period with no slipping. And their convenience factor makes them exceptionally appealing.



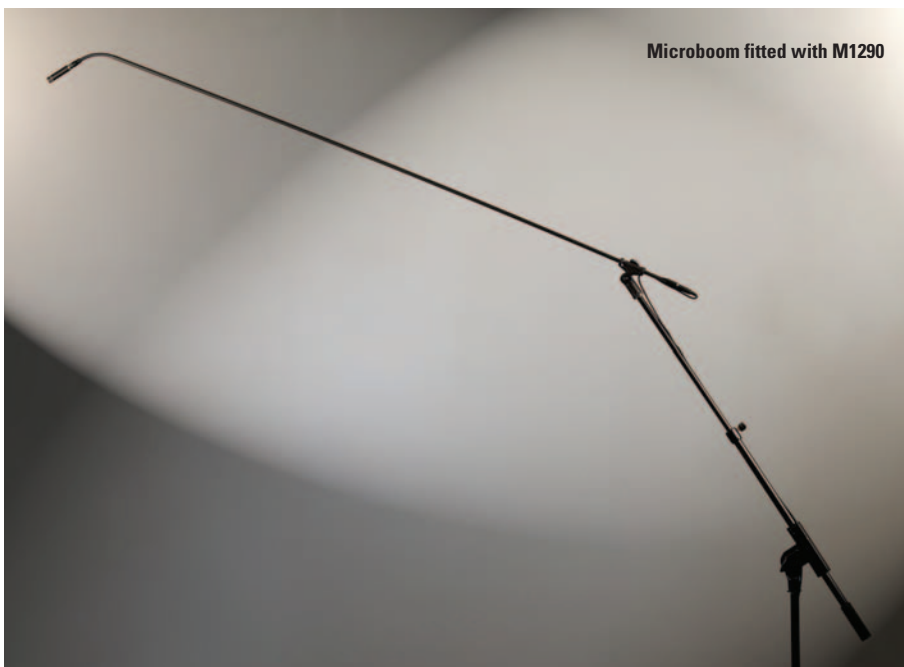
M1290

Getting More With Less

We've all heard the classic formula for a great drum sound: "Great drums, great room, great mics, and don't mess with it too much." The 1290s gave us a chance to put that formula to the test. The kit had fresh heads and was tuned. The room was kind to drums: relatively ambient but not out-of-control, and big enough to allow the sound to "breathe."

And the mics? The playback was totally flat and dry: zero EQ, zero compression, no effects whatsoever. We just brought up the three faders—and the sound that came from the monitors was stunning. The toms were strong and deep, without sounding boomy or muddy. The cymbals were clear and present without any harshness or "spit" on top. And the snare was *there*. Assuming you were looking for a big, somewhat ambient drum sound, you could make a pro-quality record with just those three mics and no processing at all.

I wanted a second opinion, so I had other folks (a singer and a drummer) listen. They agreed that the drum sound rocked. I was so enamored of the sound that I felt the need for a reality check. I ran the 1290s against mics that I knew were great overheads: a pair of German-made small-diaphragm condensers that cost three times what the 1290 sells for. And the results? They were definitely on the same level quality-wise. The differences were more a matter of taste than of one being "better" than the other. The 1290 might be a hair shyer in the bottom octave and a bit smoother on top. But you'd be hard pressed to differentiate between them in a



full mix.

Of course, some styles of music require a more controlled, tighter sound than can be captured by just a pair of overheads and a kick mic. Miking the kit with a full compliment of Micros would give you all the options. You can close mic with the 1244s for individual control of each drum, and add the overheads to taste. Or start with an organic sound, and then add the close mics as necessary.

Final Impressions

I've listened to a number of mini condenser mics, and my usual impression is, "For such little mics, they sound pretty darned good." This was different. If you didn't look at the Audix Micros, you'd think you were hearing very high-quality

standard-sized mics. But the Micro's *are* tiny, so besides the great sound you get the very large convenience that goes with their very diminutive size. They're not the most inexpensive mics in their class. But from what I've heard so far, they just might be the best.

THE NUMBERS	
1244 (cardioid)	\$379.00
(includes Dvice-Micro & Dclamp-Micro)	
1244 (hypercardioid)	\$399.00
(includes Dvice-Micro & Dclamp-Micro)	
1290 (cardioid)	\$399.00
1290 (hypercardioid)	\$429.00
MicroBoom with 1290 (cardioid)	\$579.00
MicroBoom with 1290 (hypercardioid)	\$599.00
Dvice-Micro	\$29.95
Dclamp-Micro	\$29.95
www.audixusa.com	



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