

Electro-Voice ND Series Microphone Collection

By Jon Matthews

For me, the Electro-Voice brand is synonymous with quality, history, value, and performance. Their microphones first came to light in the broadcast world; watch just about any televised music performance or interview from the '60s or '70s and you're likely to spot one. EV is also responsible for a bona fide classic in the venerable RE-20, a mainstay in radio and recording studios around the world.

My own pair of EV 635As are frequently used on drums in the studio or as a hanging amp mic for live sound; therefore, I jumped at the chance to explore the company's ND Series of mics.

First Impressions

When I flipped open the flight case, I was greeted by a very handsome family of microphones. I was immediately struck by the satisfying weight of each of the eight models – the hefty die-cast zinc bodies seem reassuringly well manufactured and the grilles look like they'd stand up to some serious bumps. The black polyurethane paint and grey accents make for a sleek, professional look that shouldn't stand out onstage while exuding class up close. Off to a good start...

In Use

There are four vocal mics: the ND76 and ND76S (with on-off switch), ND86, and ND96. Like all of the models in the series, each of these was designed with a very specific use in mind. The ND76 and ND76S are considered "general purpose" – large-diaphragm dynamics with a cardioid polar pattern. Moving up to the ND86, you get a super-cardioid pattern designed for further rejection of off-axis sounds and feedback. The ND96 boasts a hyper-cardioid pattern that should prove useful on exceptionally loud stages, as well as a frequency scoop switch that further smooths out low-mid boxiness. Cleverly, each of these mics has a distinctly different grille design, making them easy to identify at a glance, which speaks to the attention to detail here.

I tested these live on both male and female voices on a small soft-seater show and was very pleased with the results. Each offered the shared characteristics of a smooth, detailed top end, plenty of mid punch, and big, round lows that sounded weighty without straying into boomy territory. I was particularly fond of



the ND86, which seemed especially flattering to its male vocalist.

Moving on to the instrument microphones, the ND44 and ND46 are both aimed at louder tasks such as drums, guitar amps, and horns, but different enough to stand apart from each other both in looks and application.

The ND44 is the smaller unit, featuring a pivoting head that makes placement on drums a breeze, especially with the included rim-mount clip. Its flat grille and diminutive stature also make it a natural as a hanging mic for guitar cabs. I used this mic on a jazz guitarist and found it delivered a full, accurate reproduction of his amplified tone. On toms, it offers plenty of attack and more than enough bottom, and with the pivoting head, it's a no-brainer for this particular assignment, either live or in-studio.

The big brother ND46 cuts an impressive figure, and I believe it's one of the gems of the ND line. Based on the rotating head design of the older N/D468, the ND46 ups the game by concealing the signal wire inside the yoke and adding an ingenious locking mechanism, allowing you to set the mic head in many positions, from straight to just past 90 degrees in either direction. The locking mechanism feels quite robust and can be released with one finger, which makes the mic a joy to position. The ND46's larger diaphragm allows it to reach down lower than the ND44 while offering a slightly smoother tone, and I just loved it on studio guitar cab and snare duties, where it sounded rich, bright, and open with excellent off-axis rejection of hi-hats. A real winner.

For bass instruments, there's the ND68 supercardioid dynamic. As one might expect, the sound on offer is somewhat tailored to kick drums, with some low-mid scoop and high-mid boost, but it's not as "pre-EQ'd" as, say, the Audix D6. I might be more inclined to use this microphone on a jazz- or roots-style kick as opposed to rock, although with some sculpting, I'm sure it would still deliver the goods as it's

got more than enough thump. The ND68 also excelled on floor tom and bass cab, delivering a detailed, full-bodied fretless bass tone that perfectly fit the mix.

Finally, we have what I consider to be another star: the ND66 small diaphragm condenser. Before I even heard it in action, I was impressed by its pivoting head, with a locking mechanism similar to the ND46. It also features a selectable -10dB or -20dB pad and a high pass filter (75 Hz or 150 Hz). In a shootout, I put this mic up against a Josephson C42 and was shocked at how well it held up. On overhead, the two mics sounded very close, both providing a fast, sparkly, detailed mono representation of the drums and cymbals with tremendous attack and fullness. On acoustic guitar, the differences became a little more apparent, with the C42's highs sounding perhaps a little sweeter and the ND66 representing the midrange more honestly. I'd actually be more than happy to use either one, and considering the ND66 is half the price and adds the high-pass and pad features, it is truly a steal of a deal for the recordist or live sound engineer on a budget.

Summary

In my estimation, elegant looks, top quality fit and finish, big league performance, and down-to-earth pricing should make Electro-Voice's new ND line a massive success, and I'm happy to recommend them for live and recording use at any level. Now, to crack the piggybank and pick up some of these killer tools for myself...

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