

ELECTRO-VOICE ND96

Checking out a new dynamic vocal microphone and its siblings. *by Craig Leerman*

Last year Electro-Voice introduced the ND Series of microphones, consisting of four vocal and four instruments models suited for live performance and studio applications. On the instrument mic side, there are three dynamic models — the cardioid ND44, supercardioid ND46, and supercardioid ND68 (tailored for bass drum) — joined by the ND66 cardioid condenser. Meanwhile, vocalists can choose among four dynamic designs that include the cardioid ND76 and ND76S (equipped with an on/off switch), supercardioid ND86, and the flagship supercardioid ND96 that I'm primarily evaluating here.

The ND Series incorporates neodymium magnetic structures; EV was the first mic manufacturer to capitalize on neodymium with the release of the popular N/DYM Series almost three decades ago. Neodymium magnets are more powerful than conventional magnets utilized in mics, helping to deliver a more linear frequency response and higher output level.

All ND dynamic models offer a new large-diaphragm capsule designed to further the capabilities of the original N/DYM capsule, and they're also equipped with a hum-bucking coil to guard against line hum. The four

vocal mics also have shock-mounting for the capsules to minimize handling noise.

POINT OF EMPHASIS

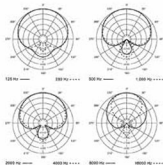
The ND96 is outfitted with a 2-position vocal presence emphasis switch that has a flat setting and a presence booster setting that reduces certain low-mid frequency areas and emphasizes key upper-midrange vocal areas. The company states that the result is "a more profound vocal edge when driving the voice higher in the mix."

The mic has a stated frequency response of 140 Hz to 15 kHz, a sensitivity rating of -49.6 dBV/Pa (open Circuit Voltage 3.3 mV/Pascal) and can handle SPL greater than 140 dB. It's about 6.7 inches long and 2 inches wide at the grill end, and is covered with a durable black polyurethane finish. It ships with a padded zipper case and a rugged clip.

My first impression upon opening the box was that the ND96 is a good-looking microphone, with a distinctive flat-end grill. It feels solid in hand and I really like how there's a choice of flat or vocal emphasis rather than just a "roll-off" switch, which is the case with many mics of this type. The switch is well recessed and needs a small tool like a screwdriver or ballpoint pen to change the setting, so it won't accidentally get changed in use.

The zippered pouch is also a nice touch. I'm always grabbing mics as needed and tossing them into a gig briefcase or work-box drawer, so having a pouch for storage helps keep it looking new.

Plugged into my test rig, the mic sounded great with very little handling noise. The presence booster setting does indeed reduce some low-mid frequen-



Polar response of the supercardioid ND96.

cies and boosts some upper-midrange frequencies, providing a distinct flavor that's different from the flat setting. The change in tone was not too drastic, but could definitely be heard, and to my ear it could work quite well with certain vocalists. Further, everyone who tried the mic at our shop was impressed with both the build and sonic quality.

FIRST UP

Satisfied that the everything was working correctly, I took the ND96 out to a few gigs. The first application was with a church praise band that features both male and female singers. I tried the mic on the female lead first, setting the switch to the flat setting. She has a very full voice and solid mic technique, and sounded great in the PA with very little channel EQ applied.

After a break I switched the setting on the mic to the presence booster and thought she sounded a bit more "forward" in the mix. While she was using the ND96, I placed an ND86 that EV had also sent along with the male vocalist. It too is a nice mic, and it worked well with



Electro-Voice ND96 dynamic mic.



a male voice.

For the last set, I swapped the mics, with the ND96 sounding great on a male voice as well, especially when he was singing low notes. (I also liked the ND86 on the female singer's voice.) While both mics performed admirably, I really like the tone shaping choice that the vocal presence emphasis switch gives the user on the ND96.

During the same event, I also deployed an ND44 on the rack tom, an ND66 condenser on hi-hat, and an ND68 on kick. These mics really rocked it on the drum set. The heads of both the ND44 and ND66 rotate (tilt) to make placement easier, with the ND66 also offering selectable -10 dB and -20 dB pads as well as 75 Hz and 150 Hz high-pass filters.

In addition, the ND44 includes a rugged drum clamp/clip that was easy to position on the tom, while the ND68 made it easy to get a "thumpy" kick sound out of a smaller-than-usual 20-inch drum. As a result of this experience, I hope EV offers some ND drum mic packages in the future.

MOVING ALONG

A friend invited me to see his alt rock band play at a large showcase at a nightclub, and I asked if he'd try the ND96 for a set. He agreed and I went early so he could get acquainted with the mic during sound check. I switched it to the presence emphasis setting, and right away he loved the way he sounded through the monitors. In fact, he liked it so much that he used it for the entire show, and

it sounded excellent. (As I sat at the bar surrounded by friends with a drink in hand and listening to a great band, I was thinking to myself that this is how you do a Road Test!)

A few weeks later, we provided production for a band flying in from New York to do a performance at a casino ballroom in Las Vegas. The 5-piece group consists of drums, bass, guitar and two keyboard players who both sing, as does the drum-

Later, listening to the recording, the soft-spoken chairman sounded better than ever

mer. I placed the ND96 on the male lead singer who plays keyboards, using the flat setting. He has a nice tenor voice, and the mic really suited him.

I also placed the ND86 on the female keyboard player and then "went outside the box" in deploying the ND46 for the drummer's vocal. This mic is primarily intended for instrument applications, but it handled the vocal without a hitch. The drummer also really liked the smaller package that stayed out of the way of his sticks. Meanwhile, the ND68 handled kick, the ND44 took care of floor tom, and the ND66 served as a single overhead. Again we captured great sound from the kit.

The complete ND Series, comprised of four models for vocals and four more for instruments.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Finally, I took the ND96 to a corporate meeting we've worked before. It has 20 people seated at tables arraigned in a large U shape. Mics are placed in desk stands so the participants can hear each other through a small PA, and the meeting is recorded so minutes and notes can be typed later.

The chairman has a softer speaking voice, and I decided to try the ND96 with him. The supercardioid pattern worked better than the cardioid mics I normally employ, and it was easy to get his vocal "hot" enough to be clearly heard. Later, listening to the recording, the soft-spoken chairman sounded better than ever.

Based on these experiences, I'd be more than happy to show up at a gig and see only ND Series mics in the locker. The ND96 is truly a stellar vocal mic, and I particularly love the ability to choose between a flat setting or a presence setting. The other mics in the series also performed at a very high level, no matter where I placed them. So if you're in the market for new mics, be sure to put the ND Series at the top of your list. **ES**

U.S. street prices for the ND Series range from \$129 to \$199, depending on model.

Senior contributing editor **Craig Leerman** is the owner of Tech Works, a production company with offices in Las Vegas and Reno.