

Hebden Sound HS3000 Series

It's a name that won't be immediately stirring to all mic aficionados but recognition will be improved if we add that there is a connection in lineage to the Calrec brand. Stick mics are enjoying a resurgence and one of the longest-lived types is available again for auditions.

JON THORNTON swaps his capsules.

IT'S STRANGE, BUT SOMEHOW very satisfying, that some microphone designs are so good and respected that they simply refuse to fade away, no matter what life throws at them. Instead, they seem to possess the Phoenix-like ability to be constantly reborn and rejuvenated. Hebden Sound's latest offerings are a case in point. They can trace their technical roots back to an original Calrec design dating from the 1960s. When Calrec made the decision to cease production of microphones in 1994, ex-Calrec employee Keith Ming licensed the design and carried on production under the Hebden Sound badge. Following Ming's death, the company was acquired by yet another ex-Calrec staffer, David Anderson. Until this point, the original designs had been largely unchanged, but under Anderson's stewardship manufacturing processes have been streamlined and the original product range refined and developed.

The HS3000 series is the result and consists of a standard preamplifier body coupled with a set of interchangeable small diaphragm capsules. Available as a single microphone body with one supplied

capsule, or as a matched pair with multiple capsules, or indeed any permutation of the above — the HS3000 series is almost unique in being a wholly British designed and manufactured microphone.

The kit supplied for review was a stereo pair, supplied in a very neat foam lined protective case with a pair of omni and a pair of cardioid capsules. Also in the case are a pair of solid microphone clips and a pair of anti-vibration mounts. All in all it's a very tidy and aesthetically pleasing kit — with only one potential problem. Maybe it's the chunkiness and smooth machining of the microphone body, and perhaps the pistol grip looks of the supplied shock-mounts, but I'm almost positive that anybody taking this through an airport scanner would be inviting the full-on strip search...

At 160mm long by 23mm wide with a capsule attached, the microphone is quite compact but surprisingly weighty at 290g. Changing capsules is simply a matter of unscrewing one and screwing on another, and the microphone is completely devoid of any external controls. This minimalist approach extends beneath the surface as the electronics have been kept to a bare minimum with no unnecessary filtering or other tweaking of the microphone's response. One big change from the original Calrec design is that the output is now electronically, rather than transformer, balanced.

With the cardioid capsule in place (subcardioid and hypercardioid capsules are also available, but weren't supplied for review), the first test was female vocals. My overwhelming recollection from using Calrec mics in the past has been 'nice but noisy', and I'm glad to say that this has changed. Certainly, one expects a small diaphragm design to perform less well than a large diaphragm design in this area, but the quoted self-noise figure of 17dBA seems justified and perfectly acceptable.

At a reasonable distance from the capsule, the vocal was pleasantly uncoloured, if a trifle thin sounding at the bottom end. Countering this, though, was a marked absence of any mid-frequency aggressiveness to the sound, instead retaining a natural, almost soft quality with a hint of 'air' in the top registers. Moving in closer showed a strong susceptibility to plosives — no pop shield is provided, but is certainly needed one in this application. On an acoustic guitar as a spaced pair, the cardioid capsules did a fair job, although there was a tendency for the sound to be a little forced and closed in. This is surprising given that the frequency response of the mics is very even and smooth within the pick-up area with no sudden tonal shifts as the source moves off axis. This same characteristic, though, was beneficial when set up as an overhead pair on a drum kit, helping to focus in on the kit sound. Again, the response of the microphones

here was smooth, almost understated.

Returning to the acoustic guitar, again with a spaced pair, but switching to the omni capsules changed things considerably. There was a real sense of the sound opening up and sounding less 'recorded', even with relatively close positioning. At the same time, the room acoustic never felt out of proportion to the direct sound, just very natural.

At UK£365 for a single preamp body with one capsule, these microphones are not without competition. Additional capsules will set you back £195, and the kit supplied for review weighs in at UK£1120 (two bodies, two sets of capsules, case, etc.). They are only available from Hebden Sound directly.

There are cheaper small diaphragm models out there, both back-electret and true capacitors — but the HS3000 series is different. These mics are British to the core — simple and unfussy in appearance and sound, they nevertheless just get the job done without any aggravation. They deserve to succeed for at least as long as their predecessors. ■



PROS	Well built, simple and unfussy design; neutral, understated sound; interchangeable capsules really do change the character of the microphone.
CONS	A pad would be useful; not for you if you like a 'tuned' sound.
EXTRAS	The HS3000 series individual microphones are available in four polar patterns: the HS3010 omnidirectional; the HS3020 cardioid; the HS3030 hypercardioid; and the HS3040 subcardioid. All are also available as stereo pairs.

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