MicW HN101

Getting better known as a microphone brand this Chinese manufacturer's range is also getting bigger. JON THORNTON looks at a pair of omnis.

Distributed in the UK and Ireland by eMerging, MicW probably won't be a familiar name to everyone as a manufacturer of studio microphones. In fact, the Beijing-based company is relatively new to the studio market, although not to microphone manufacture generally. Founded in 1989, BWSA Technology became established in the field of industrial test and measurement microphones while developing the R&D, manufacture and test facilities required to do this. MicW is a relatively recent brand developed by BWSA to enter the professional recording market although there's a good deal of technology transfer at play here particularly with regard to the company's omnidirectional capsule design.

The MicW product range is now rather extensive and features a range of vaguely familiar looking large and small diaphragm mics (although all of the 'stick' variety), as well as a compact microphone (similar in form factor to the Schoeps CCM range), a shotgun and a boundary design. The range uses a variety of capsule sizes, ranging from 7mm to 37mm in diameter, and also employs a number of different materials for the diaphragms, including nickel and gold sputtered polymer.

The model supplied for review was the HN101 from the 'N' range, meaning it employs a nickel diaphragm. In fact, I was supplied with a matched pair. The kit includes the microphones, a pair of miniature 'push-through' suspension mounts, a stereo bar, a pair of foam windshields and three alternative nose grids for each microphone to tweak their free field response if required. All of this comes supplied in an aluminium briefcase.

The HN101 is what MicW describes as the 'handheld' version of its N101 microphone, and differs chiefly by the inclusion of a three-position switch that will engage a high pass filter (6dB/octave at 75Hz) and a -10dB pad. It's a strange descriptor to add, as there's a fair amount of handling noise evident if you do try to use it as a handheld microphone. Body construction is stainless steel finished in matt black, and it feels solid with the possible exception of the aforementioned switch, which has a little too much 'springiness' in it for my liking.

Internally, the nickel diaphragm measures 19mm in diameter and is married to a transformerless output stage. The capsule is a true pressure type, giving an omnidirectional response. For comparative purposes I set the HN101 up alongside a DPA 4006 (not the TL version), which seems to be the market segment that MicW is aiming at. Indeed there's a certain visual similarity to DPA mics in the MicW range *(Which is unnecessary. Ed*) notwithstanding the fact that there may be only so many ways to design a stick format omni…

First impressions of the HN101 are that it is quiet, neutral and blessed with a nice healthy output level (sensitivity is quoted as 40mV/PA). With spoken word as the source and moving around the mic there's very little unevenness to the response — a slight dip in the HF at the rear of the microphone due to masking. Moving onto acoustic guitar, with the standard free field grid fitted to the 4006 and the closest equivalent on the HN101, and there's plenty of detail, a nice extension in the low end and just a little bit of HF emphasis when used close-up that helps lift some of the string detail out of the sound. Overall it's a sound that is very neutral and not overly flattering. If anything, the DPA sounds a little more restrained in this application, slightly softer in its overall tonality.

Giving both microphones a little more space, the next test was percussion (congas and a cow-bell), using a single overhead microphone, just under a metre away. There's almost nothing to choose between the microphones in this application — transient response from both is excellent, and there's a good reach to both while still getting a sense of ambience from the room. The final test was as a spaced pair on a drum kit with one microphone positioned just over the floor tom and the other slightly forward of the kick drum, equidistant from the snare. Although both the HN101s and the 4006 pair gave decent results — albeit with a little too much room sound due to their omni response — the HN101s started to sound a tiny bit hyped and ever so slightly 'splashier' than the DPAs, particularly when there was a lot of cymbal action. Fitting the supplied GD051 grid (the closest equivalent to the DPA's close miking grid) helped a little in softening things up, but the DPAs had the edge here in overall smoothness. That's not to say that the HN101s fare poorly here — it's something of a matter of taste and some colleagues preferred the slightly brighter sound of the MicW offering in this application.

I hadn't expected to be as impressed by these microphones as I was and had expected the DPAs to trounce them at every turn, but that wasn't entirely the case. They give the 4006s a run and if ultimately the DPAs win overall on absolute accuracy and smoothness, you have to consider that against the price. They aren't a cheap proposition and a pair of HN101s will set you back UK£2376 (+ VAT). I still wouldn't use them handheld though… ■

PROS Transparent and detailed; nice set of accessories included with matched pair; solid construction, quiet.

CONS Not sure about the 'handheld' tag; pad/HPF switch seems a little flimsy; can sound a little bit splashy in some nearfield applications.

EXTRAS

The N151 is a cardioid microphone with a pressure gradient capsule that uses similar material as the N101 with a nickel diaphragm and stainless steel housing. A stereo pair kit is available of two matched N151 microphones.

Contact

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