

Sennheiser MKE Platinum

Small, beautifully made and subtle, miniature mics have many uses outside the typical application of theatre. **NEIL HILLMAN** presses his in to service in broadcast.

IN MY CRAFT OR SULLEN ART, Exercised in the still of night' wrote the depressive, Dylan – Thomas, not Bob – and offering as perfect an introduction to one-man-band-dubbing as you will ever see.

The reason for my alignment to the woeful Welsh wordsmith is that the melancholy mood of Thomas's prose underlines the despair I have come to feel about the enormous hole that British television has dug for itself.

This is epitomised in the 'reality' genre, by an offering from the UK's Channel 5 which was, quite literally, sh*t. Enemas and excreta analysis aside, Celebrity Detox Camp should, but almost certainly won't, mark the nadir of the broadcasting output here in Britain.

Sennheiser's new MKE Platinum sub-miniature, clip-on, condenser microphone was also a source of dismay. Because it's disgraceful too? No, quite the opposite! It is such a wonderful piece of engineering, created with such obvious care and crafting, design and development, that it makes my heart ache that such an enormous gulf grows bigger by the day between the good and honest intention of creating better technological tools for skilled practitioners, and the bad, inept way that technicians are asked to apply their skills.

The Sennheiser MKE Platinum microphone is a wonderful little device. So what sets it apart from others in its field? Two things, the first of which benefits mainly stage applications, but not exclusively so: it is impervious to sweat. The patented 'Umbrella Diaphragm' comprises of two individual diaphragms fitted to both sides of the diaphragm ring. The lower is active and forms the capacitive electro-acoustic transducer together with the back plate. The top diaphragm is passive and seals the microphone against moisture.

The housing is sealed by a silicon ring. The diaphragms are in fact made from different materials, but as they are extremely small and thin (> 1µm), this does not seem to affect their overall performance one

jot. The frequency response of the omni capsule shows a gentle rise from 2kHz to a point 4dB up at 15kHz. At the other end, a 4dB roll-off of LF starts at 60Hz. The capsule can also handle a high pressure level of 142dB between its range of 20Hz – 20kHz. The microphone's impedance is given as 1kohm, and requires a minimum terminating impedance of 4.7kohm.

The second thing is that the combined size of the head, and the light, 1mm diameter connector cable make one half of an equation for successful, unobtrusive concealment of the mic under clothes for drama or presentation work; with none of the rustle associated with the cable itself as it finds its way to the transmitter. The other half of the equation is that the loss of HF associated with burying the microphone under costumes has been addressed. Two different caps – a short clip-on MZC-1, and a longer clip-on MZC-2 – may be slipped over the mic head. Both provide a lift starting at about 5kHz and peaking 4dB up at 10kHz in the case of the long cap, or a more gentle 1.5dB lift in the case of the shorter cap.

The obligatory accessories are supplied too: a domed windshield offering a stated 20dBs of protection; a tie-clip mounting enabling the mic head to be turned through 360 degrees in 90 degree stages; and a variation on the Tram TR-50 two-pronged 'Dracula' clip.

I liked having a little more control over the mic's response once it was buried, and I felt that the HF tip-up achieved through the clip-on lids helped: in the case of the large lift MZC-2, in overcoming the boomy, chesty nature of a man's voice. The smaller MZC-1 helped redress the balance of a female voice. It's all subjective, and the rule book tends to go out of the window when you are forced

down the personal mic route. Results are unpredictable under these circumstances; some voices are improved and others you just do your best with. But in the theatre of conflict between boom-swinging or personal-miking, the Platinum proved itself to be a valued ally.

And right now, feeling like I do, I need all the friends I can get. 'I'm a sound engineer – get me out of here!' ■

PROS

Flesh or graphite colours aid concealment; 'personal moisture' resistant.

CONS

I wonder about the longevity of the cable between the transmitter connector and the capsule. Strain-relief where the mic joins the transmitter would prevent the cable carrying the full weight of the unit when the transmitter is dropped.

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