

Sennheiser IE500 PR

OLA ONABULÉ tests a newly developed, dynamic wideband transducer IEM

I am both a stage and studio dweller. A touring singer-songwriter who produces and engineers his own albums. I travel the world performing my songs at festivals, theatres and jazz clubs in a range of formats and ensembles from acoustic jazz trios to my six-piece band as well as big band jazz ensembles and the occasional symphonic orchestra.

Whatever the configuration, I usually have one simple requirement with regards to monitoring: to hear myself as clearly and as naturally as possible in the context of a good mix of the instruments on stage. My entire performance, technically and emotionally, depends on it. To this end, I have always been a keen and early adopter of advancements in in-ear-monitoring technology and have used professional custom moulded pairs for at least 12 years.

No crossovers

The IE500 Pro are Sennheiser's latest ear monitors. My curiosity was piqued on learning that they are single dynamic driver, low distortion and no crossover variations in a world in which multi-driver, multi-crossover earphones for performers are very plentiful. The drivers are 7mm, 16Ω impedance and the quoted frequency response range is vast at 6Hz-20kHz.

Included in the box are the earphones with clear 'see-through' casing and cord, a small pouch, the cleaning tool and seven pairs of ear tips/adapters in a range of sizes including the ones already on the ear buds. There are four pairs of foam adapters and three pairs of silicone ones. A good selection with something for every shape and comfort requirements.

The first thing that struck me about the IE500 Pro was how light they were in weight by comparison with others I have used. I wore them all day for a few days without any discomfort.

They have a slick braided cord that resisted easy tangling. Trying to unravel the mystery of perpetually tangled cords can be a real panic intensifier when you are hastily trying to put your 'buds in as you hurry on stage. The braiding felt like it would offer an element of durability and 'shock absorption' against the rigours of particularly energetic stage performances. In addition, based on hard lessons learned on the road, I truly appreciated the fact that at this price point (£499) the cord was easily detachable and replaceable.

The earphones are designed to fit over and around the ear and do so easily and very well. They have a thick but pliable plastic tube that can be shaped accordingly for comfort and snugness. The two cords are then fed at the back into another little clear tube that adjusts the tightness of the monitors around the back of the wearer's head by gliding along the braided cord. As I move around a lot on stage and tend to work up a bit of a soul sweat, I really enjoyed the ease with which this process worked.

How do they sound?

The mids are solid and confident. Distortion just didn't



happen. No harshness or unrealistic upper mid-range 'honkiness', especially in the voice frequencies which can be really off-putting for a singer. When I switch to my falsetto voice, I don't want to feel like I have to 'pull back' from the sound I'm going to hear in my monitors.

As for the low-end frequencies, double bass and kick were rendered in realistic un-hyped clarity. With lesser earphones, the tendency is to rely on feeling the 'energy' of the low end in the absence of being able to distinctly hear the actual detail of the instruments in the low end as they sound in the real world.

The high frequencies are sweet and not fatiguing, both on and off stage, I had these earphones in all day for many days listening to a range of musical styles without my ears getting tired and worn out by brutal high frequencies.

My overall impression of the sound of these monitors is that they are as neutral or natural sounding as any other models I have heard yet. Curiously, they

have an openness that defies their size and design. That fabulously wide frequency range really pays off, and these ear monitors handle

their business with consummate ease as a result of their impressively high SPL handling at 126dB. I was left wide-mouthed with

amazement that the single dynamic driver was capable of producing such a fabulously clear and detailed sound.

I would recommend the IE500 Pros to any member of my tribe – singers, that is – who needed a non-custom moulded pair (maybe a first professional set) that could give them all that a monitor could at a comparatively low price. I would also recommend them to the professional singer/musician who owns a custom moulded pair of monitors but needs a 'daily driver' that could serve the dual purpose of listening to music on the go, rehearsals and gigs and everything in-between without compromising on sound quality or risking the super expensive custom moulded technology they may own. **i**

Socially conscious singer/songwriter Ola Onabulé has built an enviable career as an international touring performer and has now turned his attention to the North American market with a newly recorded collection of original songs, to be released 30th August. www.ola-onabule.co.uk.

resolution/VERDICT

PROS No harshness or distortion, open sound. Extended frequency response. Removable cable – which does not tangle!

CONS If you are a tall male, you may be mistaken for security personnel as you will be wearing these Sennheisers rather a lot!

sennheiser.com/ie-500-pro