REVIEW

AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-ANC7 QUIETPOINT

I wish I’d had a pair of these 10 years ago when I first started working on large festival stages. It’s almost impossible to work in that environment and protect your ears; the noise levels are often extreme and no combination of earmuffs and plugs seem to help. I used to wear both – determined as I was to protect my hearing – but unfortunately this only created other problems: an inability to hear my work colleagues properly and odd fiddles of bass frequencies. It was a claustrophobic and isolating world – tiring and yet largely ineffective.

Now, finally, the solution is noise-cancelling headphones. The latest offering from Audio-Technica in this field is the QuietPoint headphone. These cans do an amazing job of cancelling out noise from the surrounding environment – be it a PA, a jet engine, a noisy office or a chainsaw – by analysing external sound via two small mics on the outside of the earcups, and replaying a phase-inverted equivalent in an attempt to cancel the sound before it enters your ear.

The QuietPoints do a remarkable job, significantly reducing load, booming PA stacks to weedy little critters with no brain-adding bass frequencies whatsoever. Massive environmental bass is almost entirely eradicated, and the result is a vastly quieter and much ‘thinner’ sound overall, providing the wearer with a safer, clearer and quieter working environment. Hoo-hoody-ray.

But these headphones aren’t just great high-end ear-muffs, they’re also good for critical listening. Like almost every Audio-Technica headphone I’ve worn in recent times, the QuietPoints have a nicely balanced and smooth tone, providing clear extended bass frequencies and a relaxed high end.

The QuietPoints work conventionally with or without the noise cancelling electronics switched on too, unlike some others that won’t replay audio unless the phase-cancelling is engaged. The only issue I’ve had is that when you’re listening to music and switch the noise cancelling on; the volume jumps significantly – almost akin to slamming a mix through a Waves L2.

But, overall, these are great little headphones and versatile to boot. Andy Stewart

Price: $445

Technical Audio Group: (02) 9519 0900 or info@tag.com.au

BOSE PANARAY 610M & 310M FLOOR MONITORS

The wedge market is top heavy – by which I mean, the ‘knock your head clean off’ sector is well serviced. Every decent PA manufacturer needs at least one thumping loud floor monitor and they’re inevitably big and expensive. Alternatively, you have the bulky/cheap moulded variety that are more at home at the end of poles (for FOH duties) and look ugly on stage. Curiously, it’s much harder to find low-profile, high quality compact floor monitors.

But for any stage that’s not powerfully loud, you’re better off having a wedge that’s compact and can’t be driven to frighteningly loud levels. Solo performers, duos, small club stages, churches, schools, orchestra pits, theatres… If you’re not competing with 130dB of backline then why have a monitor that’s pushing enough air to inflate a jumpy castle?

So it’s a big hello to the Bose Panaray 310M and 620M: incredibly light, amazingly compact and, sonically, beautifully transparent.

Which could be the end of the story, but this is Bose we’re talking about and Bose can’t release a product without some sort of smarty pants proprietary technology. The 620M features two 5.25-inch drivers with six 2.25-inch drivers in a proprietary ‘Articulated Array’ speaker design (the smaller 310M combines a 5.25-inch driver and three 2.25-inch). The cabinet shape and Bose’s penchant for combining multiple smaller drivers, means these monitors display three very different dispersion characteristics depending on whether you place the cab in ‘portrait’ mode (for a narrow individual throw) or ‘landscape’ mode (two permutations for a wider group monitoring).

These monitors are quite a revelation. They’re loud enough (113dB @ 1m and 111dB @ 1m) for any small-scale setups and (in the case of the 610M) many medium-sized stage applications, and offer a very smooth, hi-fi response. Don’t imagine these babies will walk into an on-stage role where SPL is everything, and they don’t enjoy being kicked about (at 6kg and 10kg respectively, they tend to roll away). But where reasonable SPL and a clear full-frequency sound are what matter most, these could be just the ticket.

Christopher Holder

Price: Panaray 310M: $599; Panaray 620M: $899

Bose Australia: 1800 659 433 or www.pro.bose.com

BELKIN TUNESTUDIO

Walk into Harvey Norman in the near future and sitting in the cabinet alongside docks, socks, FM tuners, purpose built hi-fis and microphones, there may be a Tunestudio (by the iPod accessoriser extraordinaire, Belkin). The Tunestudio is a recording interface that uses iPods with Voice Memo capability to record a stereo track in 16-bit/44.1k.

The Tunestudio has four input channels; two with XLR or line inputs, switchable phantom power and 60dB of gain. The third channel has stereo line inputs and the fourth features RCA connectors at line level. Each channel has a three-band fixed frequency EQ, pan pot and level control. While the lack of transport controls can be overlooked at this price point, not being able to solo or mute tracks to check individual sounds is frustrating.

A USB connection provides digital I/O to a computer. The implication here is, you can still record/monitor via your PC even if you’ve not got your iPod with you.

Speaking of which, the Tunestudio’s monitoring is a case of ‘good news and bad news’. While it provides ample control of the various hooked up sources – there are six separate knobs for iPod playback, USB-to-computer control, mix ratio between iPod and USB, headphone level, monitor level and master level – it’s let down by a lousy headphone amplifier. (The recordings themselves sound good, but there’s a noticeable lack of fidelity when monitoring from the Tunestudio as opposed to directly from the iPod.)

So, why should the Tunestudio be any different to any other hard drive recorder? Well, all-in-one hard drive recorders are portable, to a point, but the point of the Tunestudio is simply that it incorporates the portable hard drive of a generation: the iPod. So, as well as being ‘plug & play’, the iPod-centric Tunestudio is also unplug-and-play. Record your band, podcast, or DJ set; unplug your iPod, plug in your headphones or take it anywhere in this iPod-obsessed world and you’re sure to find some car, hi-fi or computer to plug it into and play. And with simultaneous recording on the iPod as well as computer, it’s a handy backup tool that fits in your hand. Mark Davie

Price: $399

CMI: (03) 9315 2244 or www.cmi.com.au

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