

Earthworks SR40V High-Definition Vocal Microphone

The SR40V has the inherent quality and smooth top-end extension of a “studio” mic, but one that is, by design, ruggedly built for onstage vocal applications.

Using a handheld condenser for your featured vocalist can be quite nice, especially when multitracking live concerts; the increased clarity and definition of a condenser helps define the vocalist in the mix, while its robust, handheld build provides protection from rough handling, temperature fluctuations and moisture better than a typical studio condenser mic would. With this in mind, I was eager to try the new Earthworks SR40V, potentially a secret weapon for the tricky app of getting “studio-sounding” vocals live, from the stage.

Features

The SR40V is a transformerless, hypercardioid, pre-polarized condenser that Earthworks calls “The World’s First High-Definition Vocal Microphone.” This claim is due in part to the extended high-frequency response and fast impulse response of its small diaphragm (9mm, 5 micron). The frequency response is an ultra-wide 30 Hz to 40 kHz, with 22 dBA of self-noise and a healthy peak input of 145 dB SPL.

The solid heft of the mic itself, Earthworks’ 15-year warranty, and a notably high-quality wooden box made the SR40V feel particularly valuable, even prior to any testing. I imagine these same qualities might translate to some psychological benefits for artist end-users, too.

In Use

I first tried the SR40V in a standard nightclub setting, mixing FOH and moni-

tors for Zoe Vette & the Revolvers (straight up rock ‘n’ roll). I provided Shure SM58s for the three band members’ backup vocals, hoping to set Zoe’s vocal sound apart with the SR40V. Ideally, I thought it might offer something a little more detailed, capturing her range between a sibilant sensitivity to a bluesy growl.

In soundcheck, I first rolled off 3-4 dB at 10 kHz and got a pleasant balance with nice mids and clear definition; for this live gig, the SR40V gave a little too much top end, yet sonically strong overall with appropriate sibilance. With one monitor wedge placed directly off-axis (rather than the preferred dual wedges with both 30 degrees off-axis as is typical when using hypercardioid mics), Zoe received plenty of monitor gain, and even more than



SR40V: an “onstage studio mic”

she needed was available before feedback.

At showtime, with the improved sonics that warm bodies provide, I was able to put almost all of the previously attenuated 10 kHz back into the mix and monitors behaved well, too, not squealing even once. Zoe found the mic to be “nice and clear, not low and muddy,” and fans commented on hearing her better than usual; I think it’s largely due to the SR40V’s flattering accuracy.

Back in the studio, I ran some side-by-side tests with my usual “featured-vocalist live condenser,” a Shure Beta 87C via my super-clean Earthworks 1024 preamp (naturally). The SR40V was way hotter, needing about 10 dB less gain than the 87C. The SR40V demonstrated more proximity effect than the 87C and had a few more problems with plosives. On lead vocals, the SR40V sounded very similar to the 87C, both open and airy (at least for a handheld), but the SR40V has a slightly sweeter high-end response. On tambourine from about a foot back, the SR40V sounded more detailed and natural, but only lightly translated “thwacks” on twos and four hits, whereas the the 87C picked up them up loudly, somewhat like a snare drum hit.

I then ran the same studio tests previously described with the SR40V and an AKG C 451; I found the two sounded rather similar, both pleasant and useful on every source except the C 451 was way too bright (rude, actually) on tambo while the SR40V was smooth. On acoustic guitar from about a foot away, the C 451 picked up way more

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bottom, making the SR40V’s output seem comparatively very thin.

Summary

Overall, I discovered that the SR40V has the inherent quality and smooth top-end extension of a “studio” mic but one that is, by design, quite useful when



PHOTO: ROB TAMAGLIONE

placed a little closer to sources, taking advantage of some proximity effect just as is often done in live sound reinforcement. Sure, “The World’s First High-Definition Vocal Microphone” is a bold claim, but if you’re looking to inject some serious class into your front line, the \$999 (street) SR40V is a great choice for capturing vocal detail and delivering it with grace. I wouldn’t recommend the SR40V for mic “coppers,” spitty vocalists, or over the top yeller/screamers;

Zoe of Zoe Vette & the Revolvers enjoys the SR40V’s detailed clarity.

yet for real singing, it’s just the ticket. Categorically, I’d rank the SR40V higher than my trusty Beta 87C and alongside a Neumann KMS 105, especially if a refined live vocal sound is the goal.

Price: \$1,499 list

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