

Glyn Johns' Drum Mic Setup: The Sound Of Led Zeppelin and Beyond!

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MAY 2015
USA \$5.99
CANADA \$5.99
VOL. TWENTY EIGHT
NUMBER EIGHT





BY PAUL VNUK JR.

If you read our review of Audix's new Limited Edition D6 drum microphone in our January 2015 issue, you will know that Audix is celebrating 30 years in the microphone business this year. Over the past three decades the Wilsonville, OR-based company has brought to market quite a few microphones that are now considered modern studio staples the world over.

Audix also has a long history of putting together well-thought-out drum mic packages. This month, for our instrument miking issue, we are taking a look at a handy little collection that happens to be made up entirely of the company's two most famous models: the i5 and the D6.

Since we gave our readers a fresh look at the D6 in the January issue, we will focus



Audix DP4 Instrument Mic Package

Beloved mics in a neat bundle—leading to cool discoveries on drum sounds

a bit more on the i5 and the package as a whole. While both mics have other signature uses, most notably on guitar and bass amps, I'm focusing this review on drum applications, with some tips on how to maximize the utility of these handy mics.

The i5

The i5 made its debut over twelve years ago and was one of the first true competitors to Shure's classic SM57. Not that there weren't other similarly-styled dynamic mics vying for the title, but the i5 is one of the few that has truly succeeded in holding its own as an honest to goodness 57 alternative. It's also no coincidence that it is Audix's number one selling microphone.

The i5 is a dynamic mic with a low mass VLM type B cardioid capsule, housed in a precision cast zinc alloy body, with a steel grille. It is dressed in a black E-coat finish with white laser etching for the model and serial numbers. It measures 5.6" with a maximum diameter of 1.48" and weighs 6.5 oz.

Some specs: output impedance of 150 ohms, sensitivity of 1.5 mV / Pa @ 1kHz, off-axis rejection greater than 23 dB, and maximum SPL over 140 dB. The i5 has a frequency response of 50 Hz–16 kHz with a healthy low end peak around 150 Hz, an

even sharper high mid peak at 6 kHz, and a sharp rolloff at the aforementioned 16 kHz.

The i5 has a high-mid-forward tone and a punchy low end. While it has seen the most use on snare and electric guitar cabinet, it also works well on acoustic guitar, vocals, percussion, and (as we will see below) toms.

The big D

The i5's partner in crime, the D6, is the largest of the D Series dynamic mics and is designed for use on low frequency sources like kick drum and bass cabinet. It features a 4 5/8" x 2" machined aluminum body that on its own is available in a choice of black, satin silver, or—if you are lucky—a limited edition paint swirl finish. The one in the DP4 kit comes in black. The D6 has a cardioid pattern and a VLM type E capsule.

Some specs: output impedance of 200 ohms, sensitivity of 0.8 mV / Pa @ 80 Hz, off-axis rejection greater than 20 dB, and maximum SPL over 144 dB. It has a frequency response of 30 Hz–15 kHz with a 2d B bump at 60 Hz, an 8 dB mid cut between 300 Hz and 1.25 kHz, and a healthy wide high boost between 3 and 18 kHz.

Sonically it is well respected for its low end boom as well as the aggressive way it captures beater click and bass notes when used on a bass cabinet.

The DP4 kit

The new DP4 kit is made up of three i5 mics and a single D6. It also includes clip style drum mounts for each i5 and is housed in an aluminum briefcase. This is a great meat and potatoes solution for miking a typical 4-piece drum kit (kick, snare and two toms), but you will need to supply your own overhead mics (such as Audix's ADX51 or SCX25A condensers).

This is essentially a complete re-tooling of the older DP4-A kit, which was made up of an i5, two Audix D2 tom mics, and a D4 tom/kick mic.

In use

While I am very familiar with the D6 on kick and the i5 on snare, interestingly I have never used an i5 on toms. The main reason for this is that the church where I am the Technical Director and live sound engineer purchased an Audix DP7 set on my recommendation years ago. The DP7 kit uses a pair of D2 mics on high and mid toms and the D4 on low tom, as well as the i5, D6 and a pair of Audix ADX51 pencil condensers on overheads. With the tom-centric D series mics in hand, I never had a reason to try an i5 on toms!

For my tests I had a friend of mine come in and play drums while I did some

comparisons between the DP7 and new DP4 sets. We also auditioned Telefunken's DD5 drum pack reviewed in January 2014 (which uses T-Funk's M80, M81, and M82 mics), and I put up a handful of Shure SM57s and a Beta 52 kick mic as well.

I found each grouping of mics was simply different from the others rather than "good" or "bad", and I am quite glad about that! Every engineer needs to know that often it's not about having a good or bad mic, it's about choosing the right mic for the job.

I would suggest that it is highly beneficial to own two or three different drum miking kits in a variety of sonic colors and styles. It does not hurt that dynamics tend to be the most affordable mics, and acquiring a large and varied dynamic mic locker is a reasonable task.



The letter D

Moving to the toms, unlike most of us who are fine to have multiple kick and snare options, I think often we find a set of tom mics that works and then stick with it for years without changing or experimenting.

In both my studio and on stage, as described above, my go-to tom mics were the Audix D2 on high and mid toms and D4 on the low toms. The D2 has a nice forward, controlled sound that yields a very produced rounded punch, and it's not shy in the bass range either with a nice 150 Hz boost. The D4 is similar, and while its low end is more laid back, it actually yields a bigger, smoother bottom end weight that lets the low tom bloom nicely in the mix. In contrast, a D2 makes the low-end ring a bit more obvious. Note that prior to the introduction of the D6, the D4 was actually Audix's kick drum mic in the line, and as such it made quite an impression on reviewer Geno Porfido back in our November 1998 issue.

The letter i

Moving to the i5 on toms was one of those "Wow, why have I not done this before?" moments. It has a similar overall voicing as the D2, but with a touch more of an 8 kHz push, and a bit of shift toward the mids that lends a beautiful, rounded



Tones, punch and sounds

After multiple passes and takes swapping the various mics in and out, here are some of the main differences and where and when I chose each mic.

Looking first at the non-Audix mics, The Telefunken M series mics sound the least drum-specific or drum-tailored of the bunch. I would use them when wanting a very natural "this is how the drums sound in the room" vibe, great for classic jazz or for vibey indie and roots rock.

On the Shure side, it's hard to argue about the sound and use of an SM57 on a snare—a forward, upper midrange crack and smack that we all know well. However, while I know tons of engineers who reach for SM57s for use on toms, this is an area where I almost always find a mic that I like better. Moving to the Beta 52 on kick, it offers one of the best and biggest low frequency captures of any kick mic I have ever used, especially in the sound hole. However, I find it too dull for use in capturing the beater up on the head.

For this reason one of my most tried and true kick drum setups for over a decade has been the Audix D6 up on the beater head—remember what I said about how marvelously it captures beater click?—with a Beta 52 in the sound hole. It truly is a great combo. However, in most modern rock situations, if I can only use one kick mic, it will be the D6 alone. That's because the D6 combines its beater click capture with a beautiful low end of its own.

presence to the toms. Note that the i5 is cardioid while the D2 and D4 are hypercardioid. This makes the i5 in theory more prone to bleed from other kit pieces, but I never found that to cause any actual problems when recording or mixing.

Overall, both the drummer and I quite liked the forceful, rounded aggression that the i5 brought to the toms, both low and high. If you are doing a record where the toms need to make a statement, the i5 is a fantastic choice. I dare say there is even a Sennheiser 421-ish top end tone to the i5 on toms, albeit with a bigger bottom heft.

Finally, we move to the snare... and to the age-old, countless SM57 comparisons that the i5 endures. In my opinion they both offer a nice mid punch and presence, with the SM57 having more midrange bite. What really sets these two mics apart on snare is the low end presence in the i5, where the SM57 has little to speak of. This makes the i5 a great choice for punching up thin-sounding snare drums, not to mention tinny-sounding guitar amps in need of better low-end presence.

This leads me to reiterate something I said early on about why the DP4 set is such a wise purchase: It's not just for drums. The i5 is also one of the best-known and most-used alternatives to the SM57, sometimes even used along with it as a complement, on guitar cabinets. And as I mentioned in my January 2015 review, the D6 is simply stellar on bass cabinet.

Conclusions

These mics and this package are a sound investment, and I mean that both sonically and fiscally. Whether you are looking for your first drum miking kit or looking to bolster an existing mic locker, these are mics that every engineer and studio should have ready to go. The fact that the whole kit comes in at such an affordable price is just icing on the cake. ☺

Price: \$585 msrp

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