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Mojave Audio MA-201 fet Review

Mar 1, 2009 12:00 PM, By Eli Crews

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Mojave Audio's new MA-201 fet large-diaphragm condenser microphone (\$695) is the solid-state alternative to the company's popular MA-200 tube mic. The two microphones utilize the same 3-micron 1-inch capsule, but they have different amplification circuits (field-effect transistor [fet] versus tube), as well as different Jensen output transformers. Mojave achieved the low price point by manufacturing the capsules in China, but all components are quality-controlled by company founder David Royer.



BACK IN BLACK

Visually, the MA-201 fet is almost identical to the MA-200 (see my review in the April 2007 issue, available at emusician.com). The most obvious difference is the black grille protecting the capsule (the MA-200's grille is silver). Both mics have the same solid, hefty feel and come with a well-designed elastic/basket shockmount and a heavy-duty carrying case. However, because the MA-201's case doesn't house a tube power supply and cable, it's roughly half the size of the MA-200's. The MA-201 accepts a normal 3-pin XLR cable instead of the 5-pin cable (originally with 7 pins) needed to power the MA-200's tube; the MA-201's solid-state electronics are powered by standard 48V phantom power. The MA-201 has no switches; it's fixed in a cardioid position and doesn't have a pad, nor does it need one (I never experienced a loud sound source overloading the mic's electronics).

ON THE JOB

The MA-201s found their way onto every tracking session I had during the test period. They faithfully captured male and female vocals, acoustic and electric guitar, upright and electric bass, tenor and soprano saxophones, grand piano, bass clarinet, bass drum, and full drum sets (as overheads as well as room mics). Only once in a few months of usage did I pull the MA-201 off a source, and it was a questionable-sounding saxophone to begin with. In every other scenario, the MA-201s gave me the sound I was looking for — natural, open, and true.

When they were directly A/B'd with other large-diaphragm condenser mics, I often felt the MA-201s had less brilliance and more midrange warmth. This was especially the case when compared with the MA-200s, which are quite bright and capture transients very quickly. Which mic I preferred depended on the source. For drum overheads, I leaned toward the MA-200s for the detail they brought out in the cymbals and toms, whereas for a certain female vocal, I opted for the MA-201, through which I heard more chest and less sibilance. In scenarios in which the MA-201s sounded a tad too dark, adding a smidgen of high-end EQ always did the trick to emphasize the upper harmonics in a pleasing way.

Mojave Audio's MA-201 fet follows in the footsteps of the MA-200, but it has a fixed cardioid pattern and is amplified by solid-state electronics rather than a tube, resulting in a warmer sound.

One standout application for the MA-201s was on piano, through a pair of Vintech X73is. I use a wide variety of miking techniques for piano, depending on how the instrument is going to fit into the song. The MA-201s served well spread out across the soundboard, close to the strings for a

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bright, present, attacky sound that cut through a dense rock track. They also sounded great backed off a bit in XY to get a roomier, larger sound for use in a sparser song. I really liked the MA-201 outside of the bass drum (through the Millennia Media TD-1) and as a bridge mic on upright bass (through the Focusrite ISA428). In both scenarios, the balance of lows to highs, or body to attack, was almost perfect and just needed a touch of standard dewoofing EQ to slip into the mix.

YOU FET YOUR LIFE

Overall, I like these mics only slightly less than the tube MA-200s, which I love and use constantly. However, taking into account that they are each \$300 less than the MA-200s, they still garner the highest mark. With this release, Mojave Audio has cemented its position high on my list of can't-wait-to-see-what's-next gear manufacturers operating today.

Value (1 through 5): 5
Mojave Audio
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