

Tape Op GEAR Reviews



Mojave Audio *MA-201 fet large-diaphragm condenser mic*

Over the past few years, Mojave Audio has established itself as a manufacturer of quality, affordable microphones with their MA-200 (*Tape Op* #55) and MA-100 (#62) tube mics. The MA-201 fet is the third microphone in their line. With the same build-quality and form-factor as the 200, the MA-201 fet could be easily confused with its older sibling, except for its black grill and the distinct lack of external power supply. The smaller carrying case is a bit of a giveaway as well; the simple aluminum box, which is no larger than a kid's lunchbox, holds the microphone and the well-designed basket shockmount. No cloth gloves required to handle the mic—the MA-201 fet is simply a working folks' mic that is fantastic at every application we tried it on.

Easily set up and positioned, the MA-201 fet is a real workhorse. During the past few months, we tried it on kick drum, snare, overhead, drum room, bass amp, double bass, guitar amp, acoustic guitar, piano, horns, and vocals; and we really liked the way it handled all types of frequencies and levels while giving us something back. What it gives back is a huge sound—with a bit more zing than its tube brother—that holds up well in the mix.

While a bit trickier to position on a snare due to its size, if you can get it in there about 8–10" away, the MA-201 fet handles transients with speed and clarity and does not dull the attack of the drum strike; in fact, it lets all of the drum's real tone through. In playbacks, the MA-201 fet tracks sounded just like the real sounds in the room—a very desirable trait if the drums sound good already. The MA-201 fet was also great on some swishy brushed-snare tracks we recently recorded for Tom Russell, with John Convertino of Calexico on drums, as it picked up every nuance of the individual wires of the brush on the snare head and had that nice brightness at the top without being harsh or brittle. In fact, these snare tracks required neither EQ nor compression when we mixed, and everyone present was amazed at how natural the snare sounded. For kick drum, the MA-201 fet was also quite interesting but almost too good for our taste as it leaned more towards a more modern, brighter, clickier sound than we prefer, but for the few sessions that needed that modern drum sound, it was perfect for the task. As an overhead and room mic, it was also accurate and open, and again very big sounding. We wished we could have tried a pair for stereo overheads, but based on how cool it was as a mono overhead, we are sure a pair would be great for overheads.

On piano, the MA-201 fet was nice and present, and it really brought out the top end of our baby grand without being plinky—while still keeping the low strings strong and full sounding. The MA-201 fet does not scoop out the midrange, which made it also a great mic for acoustic guitar. As with the snare drum, a few minutes of listening and repositioning the mic yielded a very big and natural guitar sound. On electric guitars, the MA-201 fet really excelled. From ambient vibrato through vintage small amps to distorted metal power-chords through Marshall half-stacks, it captured all the harmonic content and fullness of the instrument, amp, and speaker. Again, like on the snare, no EQ or compression was necessary. We did get to try it on standup bass also, and while it sounded good, we did not keep it up long as we are just too used to the bass sound we've gotten for years from our standard setup. We attribute this to our own impatience and pressure to keep the session moving. So instead, we switched it to the amp that we had hooked up from the standup bass pickup, and here the MA-201 fet was excellent. Like on guitar amps, the Mojave handled all the bass frequencies and levels and actually added a nice presence. Perfect.

So as you can see, we like the mic a lot for its ease of use and wide range of applications, but where it's really great is the way it is good sounding with any mic preamp it was hooked up to. From our \$100 ART tube preamp on up to our UA LA-610 (*Tape Op* #47), or our LaChapell Audio 992EG (#65), the Mojave MA-201 fet worked and sounded great. It even worked well with the onboard preamps in a Digi 002, an Mbox, and a first-generation Control|24 (with those preamps allegedly designed by Focusrite) we have at Scottsdale Community College, where I teach every Saturday. My students loved its sound and picked it as their favorite mic when we multi-mic'ed a Fender DeVille on a guitar track. One of the students went online and looked up its street price—below \$700!—and now many of them are saving their precious pennies to get one for their own fledgling studios. The Mojave MA-201 fet is obviously the perfect large-diaphragm condenser mic for the small budget studio and home recordist, but it's also equally at home in our commercial studio. I've paid considerably more for mics that the MA-201 fet is equal to in design and specification, and yet some of these mics are not as suitable for multiple tasks like the Mojave is. Once again, Mojave has produced a winner. (\$695 street; www.mojaveaudio.com)

—Craig Schumacher <wavelabstudio@qwestoffice.net>

Calma Estudios *Stickers para Pro Tools*

On the Spanish isle of Majorca, in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, there lies a luxurious recording studio and production facility named Calma Estudios, who recently made available for free download a set of QWERTY shortcut stickers they designed for Pro Tools.

(www.hispasonic.com/descargas/stickers-pro-tools)

I printed the PDF on plain old inkjet paper, and before the ink dried, I'd cut out the individual shortcut-key images and attached them to my keyboard with a glue stick. A few of the "shifted" symbols are labeled incorrectly for a US keyboard, but these can easily be blacked out with a sharpie or tweaked in Photoshop. I've always wanted a Digidesign Pro Tools Custom Keyboard (\$119), but my economic reality is a \$1.29 glue stick.

(Free download; www.calmaestudios.com)

—Scott McChane, www.scottmchane.com