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SUPERLUX PRA MICS

Drum Microphones

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Drum Microphones

Complete boxed sets of drum mics at incredibly low prices. Is it too good to be true?

Paul White

Not content with trying to pull the rug out from beneath large-diaphragm capacitor microphone prices, Superlux are now attempting the same thing with drum mics, with their PRA series. Three kits are available comprising three, four or five mics, all based around permutations of the same three models. The mics themselves are built into tough metal housings with resilient capsule supports, and certainly don't look in any way cheap. They also have the advantage over more conventional mics that they are physically small and have integral swivel mounts, enabling them to be placed for minimum inconvenience to the drummer. Each set comes in a foam-lined, rigid plastic carry case, and thread adaptors are included.

There are three mics in the PRA series, the first of which is the PRA218A kick drum mic, a supercardioid dynamic model with an extended bass response and a broad presence peak between 5kHz and 10kHz to emphasise the slap of the drum. The response falls away above this and is around 20dB down at 20kHz, earning the mic a paper response of 20Hz to 12.5kHz. Figures for noise and sensitivity have little meaning when the mic is designed to be used inches from one of the loudest instruments on earth, but this model is designed to handle very high SPLs without flinching. Unlike some kick drum mics which have humps and bumps all over their response curves, the PRA218A is free from bass humps and has only a slight LF roll-off at the bottom end to ensure plenty of sensitivity remains at the lower frequencies. In addition to its kick drum applications, the PRA218A is also recommended for timpani, large-diameter toms and djembe.

In the five-mic set I reviewed, the PRA218A was accompanied by two PRA228A dynamic snare/tom mics and a pair of

PRA268A back-electret capacitor mics. Designed for close snare and tom work, the PRA228A has a similar frequency response to the PRA218A, but with more of a bass roll-off and a slightly extended upper range, giving it a spec of 50Hz to 16kHz. This mic also has a supercardioid response and its additional uses include percussion, though there's really no reason why it shouldn't also be used to mic up electric guitar amplifiers.

That leaves the PRA268A, which again has a supercardioid pattern, but because of its back-electret design has an extended high-end frequency response. The mic works on phantom power in the range 9V to 52V and the frequency response curve is interesting in that the



Superlux PRA Series

pros

- Unbelievably inexpensive.
- Nicely styled and robustly engineered.
- Good basic drum sound.

cons

- Any criticisms of these mics are meaningless when the price is taken into consideration.

summary

Despite their 'car boot sale' price, these mics work really well. Now, even if you only work



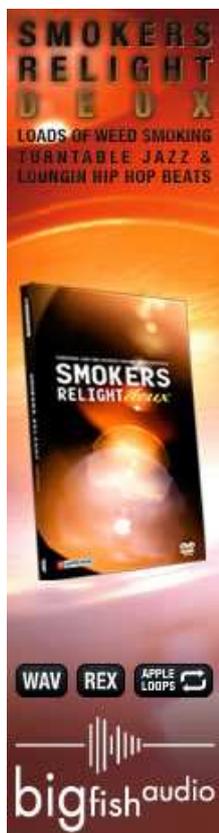
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response drops off gradually below around 300Hz, which is no bad thing in a mic designed to be used primarily as a kit overhead or for miking cymbals/hi-hats. The paper response puts the frequency range at 50Hz to 16kHz, but this takes into account the low frequency roll-off and a broad presence peak, which tends to skew the way the response actually looks. In reality, there's as much sensitivity at 20kHz as there is at 400Hz, and the mic is around three times more sensitive than the dynamic models at 6.3mV/Pa.

with drums on rare occasions, you can still afford the mics to do it.

SOUND ON SOUND

Performance

Despite their budget UK price, the mics held up pretty well in my tests with drums and assorted percussion. The PRA218A has enough sonic depth to make it an effective kick drum mic and I rather like the fact that it doesn't have the dramatically hilly frequency response of some of the more popular models. Indeed, it behaves more like a tom mic with an extended low-end response, which lends it a clean and full sound with plenty of definition, courtesy of the presence peak. There's plenty of low-end thump and, as always, you can fine-tune the sound quite a lot by changing the mic position. This mic also works well on just about any hand percussion you might have lying around, as well as on larger, deeper-pitched toms.

The PRA228A sounded tonally quite similar to the PRA218A, but with noticeably less bass extension. It is ideally matched to smaller toms, snare and hand percussion, where it behaves much like any other competent dynamic model, but with the benefit that it is easier to position. Again a good balance between depth and definition.

Finally comes the PRA268A, which sounds almost disturbingly lacking in low end when you first try it, until you realise that's exactly how it is supposed to sound. With drums, the last thing you want is to have low frequency phase



cancellation occurring between the overheads and the close mics, and rolling away the low end avoids this quite neatly. There's nothing exceptional about these mics, but they make effective overheads and are also useful as cymbal/hi-hat mics, as well as being suited to bell trees, wind chimes and similar high-pitched percussion. Though not exactly neutral sounding, the sizzle of the cymbals and the articulation of stick hits is captured well enough.

Overall, these mics turn in a pretty good performance when used with drums or percussion. Although there are better mics out there, you'd have to pay quite a lot more to hear any appreciable difference. At the price, they're an obvious contender for the live market, but they also work surprisingly well in a recording context. The dynamic mics are particularly impressive, and the compactness and swivel adaptors really do make kit miking far less stressful.

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Published in SOS April 2002

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