

Take The Mystery Out Of Mixing—See Page 52

RECORDING

The magazine for the recording musician®

Record Bands

Live On Stage & In The Studio

- Make the most of your space
- Turn your gig into a great live album
- How to be prepared—for anything!



15 Big Reviews!

Aston • Audio-Technica • Celemony • Cymatic Audio
Ear Trumpet Labs • EVE Audio • Eventide • Heavyocity
KV331 Audio • Mäag Audio • Senal • Zoom

VOL. TWENTY NINE
NUMBER ELEVEN
AUGUST 2016
USA \$5.99
CANADA \$5.99

\$5.99US \$5.99CAN





REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.



The Halo is not just an update or copy of the original, which used a semi-cylindrical design of foam and corrugated metal and was often quite heavy. It's a completely new evolution of the idea. So what's so different about it?

First, it is made—or better yet, molded—from a purple sound-damping fiber material called PET felt, which is also used in the construction of studio sound panels. It's made from 70% recycled PET plastic, which makes it almost as green as it is purple! (Sorry. Had to.)

Second, unlike pretty much every other portable vocal isolator, which is either a half cylinder or angled-panel design, the Halo is actually hemispherical on the inside... an interesting choice, as Aston's team also had a hand in designing the MunroSonic Egg monitors.

The Halo covers what Aston calls a 360-degree field, as it extends around the mic on the top and bottom as well as the sides. According to Aston, this design allows the Halo to cover 40% more surface area than the competitors. It's roughly 21" x 17" and 10" deep. The wall of the Halo is 1" thick at the edges, thickening to 4" at the rear. It is attached to a minimal metal framework and is tangibly lighter than most of the competition.

The Halo and microphone are held in place by Aston's easy-mount hardware. This mounting system is made up of only three parts in addition to the Halo itself. There is a quick-release mic arm and two threaded screw mounts that fit inside

Aston Microphones Halo

A mic isolation device that's truly like no other

Back in our April 2016 issue we introduced readers to Aston Microphones. Based in the UK, Aston came into being with the goal of creating a microphone line that (with the exception of Asian-sourced capsules) was built and crafted entirely on British shores.

Their first model was the Origin, which offered a unique look, build, and design—complete with a tumbled stainless steel body and an unprecedented flexible head grille. As I discovered in my April 2015 review, the Origin boasts its own unique sound rather than just being another “me too” clone, and yet it compares quite favorably with many of the old standbys and industry standards. Its \$250 price tag makes it one of the best entry-level mic choices on the market.

In a forthcoming issue we will be reviewing the Origin's multi-pattern big brother, the Spirit. In this issue focused on capturing bands, we're looking (well... *staring*, actually) at Aston's other new product, the Halo.

A new take on mic isolation

The Halo is a new take on the portable vocal booth concept, often known as a reflection filter, or in sE Electronics-speak, a Reflexion Filter. I bring up sE because the first Reflexion Filter was an sE product, spawning a wave of imitations and variations. What you might not know is that Aston Microphones' James Young was one of the original designers of the sE Reflexion Filter during his tenure with said company. With that in mind, it is not at all surprising that he would come up with his own version for Aston.

of each other to attach the Halo to a mic stand and allow the Halo to be adjusted back and forth for depth.

In use

Taking the Halo out of its large shipping box, its purple pod-like look is a bit startling. It actually looks like an HR Giger-designed



prop from the *Alien* films! Even more startling is how the Halo sounds. If you talk into it without a mic in place, you hear a tight hollow dead sound, almost as if the Halo is drawing your voice into a vortex of silence. It truly is a bit unsettling and weird.

When used with a microphone, you can easily play with the distance of the mic to find the best balance of openness and dryness for your particular sound.

To test it out, I paired the Halo with the most open and unforgiving mic in my collection, a Brauner Phantom Classic. The Phantom is one of those mics that will highlight a bad room and outside noise with crystal clarity if you let it. I moved the Halo and Phantom outside my studio, into a reverberant room with a concrete floor, and was amazed at how well the Halo tightened up the sound. It really does sound like it sucks up all the air around the microphone and creates a tight dead space, but one that is still natural enough for intimate vocals, voiceovers, and more.

Color me impressed! It was a marked, very noticeable improvement over the two other portable vocal booths I compared it to.

Now for an important caveat: the Halo is not a magic soundproof booth. Sounds like air conditioning, refrigerators, airplanes, and barking dogs will still make it onto your recordings, albeit at much lessened levels when the Halo is positioned correctly.

I did some tests speaking into the Halo with a loud air conditioner running in the background. The Halo controls the sound enough that when you are speaking, it focuses the sound on the source, not the background. Background noise only becomes apparent when you stop speaking, allowing you to easily cut out or gate the room noise in a worst-case scenario.

I also had someone play acoustic guitar a foot away on the other side of the Halo, while another person sang. Again, yes, the acoustic guitar will bleed into the vocal mic, but at a controlled level where the focus is still the voice.

Conclusion

This is one of those products that does exactly what it sets out to do while improving greatly on the original paradigm. I have to say, I am sold! I do weekly podcasting and music demos in a standard office with no treatment or soundproofing and an obnoxious air handler. The Halo is custom-made for such a space, and I can't wait to hear the results over the next few months. ➡

Price: \$299

More from: Aston Microphones,
www.astonmics.com