

Fantasy studios director Jeffrey wood: The process of producing

RECORDING

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REVIEW

BY DARWIN GROSSE

Marshall MXL Genesis Tube Microphone

Is this your new first-call vocal mic?

MXL has built its business around developing high-quality microphones at a reasonable price. The new Genesis microphone is MXL's shot at creating a microphone that can fill the role of go-to vocal mic at a reasonable price, and to create a piece of gear with both audible and visual appeal.

Overview

The MXL Genesis is not a shrinking violet—it is a large and heavy (6.5 lb.) microphone with a bright red body accented with gold metalwork. In addition to a standard grille, there is also a built-in metal pop screen. The body holds a 12AT7 tube, which MXL states is from a “new old stock” UK military stash.

As with most tube microphones, power is supplied from an external power supply, with a custom 7-pin cable used to connect the microphone to its power brick (which is then connected to your recording system). As is common for a purpose-built vocal mic, it features a large gold-sputtered diaphragm with a cardioid pickup pattern, a highpass filter and 10 dB pad. The package is rounded out with an effective spider-style shock mount system.

Vocals on test

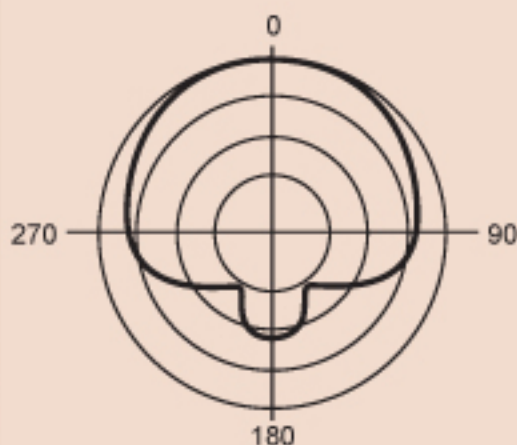
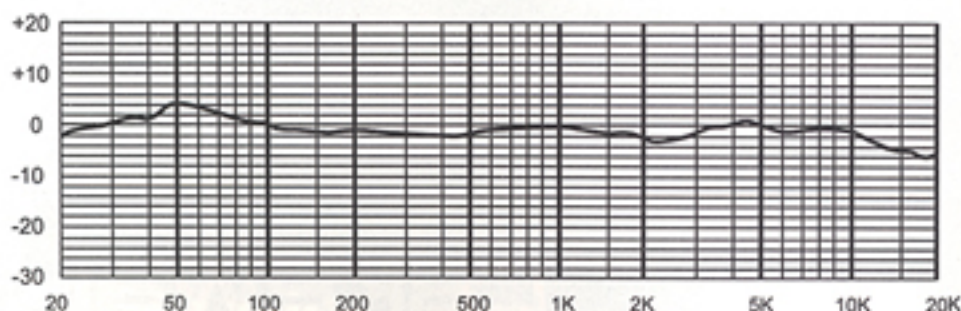
Since it is obviously a vocal mic, my first test for the Genesis was as the primary vocal mic for a female vocalist's session. This artist has a wide-ranging

vocal style, switching from gentle pure tones to sweeping blues calls in an eye blink. For this session, I wanted to have a microphone that would capture the full range of sound while maintaining a close and intimate tone. After trying out a few options, we settled on the Genesis as the vocal mic of choice.

A very pleasant surprise for me was the sound of the Genesis: rather than the artificially woolly sound I've experienced with other budget tube mics, the Genesis is clean and present while providing a smooth warmth. The performance was being accurately recorded, but I was surprised at the way the microphone enhanced the presence of the singer. The vocal track seemed to “leap” from the monitors, leading to one of the easiest and best sounding mixes I've had the pleasure of creating.

My next recording artist was almost a complete opposite: a mature solo singer/songwriter with a deep baritone voice that matched the sound of his Gibson Jumbo acoustic guitar. Given the smoothness and evenness of the Genesis on a female voice, I was curious about its effectiveness on this darker sound. Also, this was a live-to-disk recording, so it would be coupled with a standard two-mic recording field for the guitar. I wanted to see if the pickup pattern of the

Perhaps the most critical microphone in our studio's closet is the “go-to” vocal microphone. This is often the most expensive microphone in the collection, and is the first microphone that we will try with any vocalist. It is also a microphone that we will get to know intimately, and one where excellence is greatly desired.





Genesis would be tight enough for a vocal + instrument session.

The Genesis has a fairly open pick-up pattern, so mic placement took some doing. By carefully facing the vocal and instrument mics slightly off axis, I was able to get a fair amount of isolation and limited troublesome phase problems between vocal and guitar microphones. Once this was done, I was blown away by the sound of the mic—it again produced vocals that seemed to burst out of the speakers, and provided an excellent recording of the artist's work.

As a result, the Genesis has become my most-used vocal microphone—and my most requested microphone. Among local musicians, it has garnered

the nickname "The Bling Mic", with singers requesting its use during recording. While this might seem silly, it also shouldn't be discounted; if a microphone looks "top-shelf", it may provide an extra bit of confidence to a singer during recording, especially when it is also results in a world-class sound!

Other tests

Since not everyone is able to afford a single-purpose microphone, I also wanted to test the Genesis in other recording situations. It performed fine as a distance mic for acoustic guitar, and very well as a close mic for a small tube amp. It was surprisingly good as a drum overhead, although finding a mic stand that could support it (or,

more precisely, prevent it from hitting the drummer on the head) was a little difficult. While I'm not sure I would call the Genesis a good "all-around" microphone, it was sufficiently versatile that I could see it oft-used as part of a small microphone collection.

Conclusion

I really enjoyed having the MXL Genesis available, and the artists I've recorded have appreciated having it available as well. It is a great vocal mic, with a sound the belies its modest cost. Any studio looking for a "go-to" vocal mic needs to try the Genesis; my suspicion is that few would ever let it go. It will bring out the best in almost any vocal recording situation. ☺