

REVIEWS: IN BRIEF



DENON DN-C640

Denon has always turned out some impressive CD players for the professional broadcast market. Their relatively recent DN-C640, which was released in early 2007, is still one of the more sophisticated disc players available.

The single unit rack-mount design employs the use of a slot loading mechanism that quickly snaffles up a disc, and won't let you push it back in after the disc is ejected and awaiting removal from the slot. Equally as thoughtful is the eject button's locked status when a disc is in play mode. Professional heavy-duty features are abundant with pitch control, AES/EBU and S/PDIF digital output, variable and fixed volume RCA outputs and balanced XLR outs (each with their own level adjust mini-pots recessed into the rear panel).

External control options include RS232 and parallel remote connections for interfacing with pretty much every broadcast studio installation, or integration with more contemporary technology such as AMX or Crestron systems governed via good old (or is that young?) ethernet. That's right. Aside from reading CDs and DVDs of writable and re-writable persuasions – all of which can contain any assemblage of PCM, MP2, MP3 and WMA files – it can also read these file types via a network via TCP/IP. Sample rates supported include 32, 44.1 and 48k, with all bit rates being dithered down to 16-bit apart from PCM files, which will output 24-bit data.

Driving the DN-C640 is foolproof, and overall the unit feels staggeringly robust, with a cue to program button taking centre stage amongst the backlit transport controls. Of course, you can avail yourself of the infrared remote as an alternative to the front panel controls. The remote houses far more buttons than the unit itself. The big news with the DN-C640, however, is its network smarts. You could set this unit up to access terabytes of audio material without ever putting a disc in it. Sounds like the playback intergenerational-gap for countless broadcasters, provided you're cashed up. *Brad Watts*

Price: \$2195

Audio Products Group: 1300 13 44 00 or www.audioproducts.com.au



M-AUDIO PULSAR II MATCHED PAIR

M-Audio is traditionally known for its pioneering budget converters and affordable solutions for recording musicians and sound engineers alike. Nowadays the company provides a range of audio equipment and amongst this expanding portfolio is a relatively unknown collection of microphones that cater to the many varied recording styles and techniques used today. The new Pulsar II range on review here are designed to address the sonic character of acoustic instruments and recording techniques that favour a small-diaphragm condenser.

The Pulsar II 'Matched Pair' package includes two identical mics and a T-bar mounting system for XY or ORTF mic arrangements. The mics work separately too, of course, and as individual single-point devices, they sound remarkably good for the price. Their sonic character was apparently modelled on 'famous' small-diaphragm condensers such as the Neumann KM84 and in 'collaboration' with the desires of consumers. Regardless of how much truth there is to these rumours, the result is a mic with a flattering, open top end that can occasionally appear too shiny on some sources.

Overall, however, the frequency balance of these mics is good – I've grown to like them far more than I initially expected to. They have a nice focus with a robust quality to the signal, and on instruments like acoustic guitars the results are surprisingly open and balanced. Placed as stereo overheads on drums, the picture is similarly clear and powerful, bringing out the nuances of the drumkit well, without become brittle or harsh sounding.

The Pulsar IIs have a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch, six-micron Mylar evaporated gold diaphragm with a solid brass backplate and Class-A FET electronics. The switchable –10dB pad makes them great on loud sources and their 80Hz high-pass filters roll out rumble nicely.

I've used many small-diaphragm condensers over the years: Oktava 012s, Neumann KM84s and 85s, Calrec 1050s and Rode NT5s, all of which have done their job well. In this company, the M-Audio Pulsars are great all-rounders, almost on par with the KM84 for sheer versatility. They have a hint more sparkle than the more matter-of-fact KM84s, but for the asking price, they should be on anyone's shortlist, particularly if recording acoustic instruments is a priority. *Calum Orr*

Price: \$529

Digidesign: 1300 734 454 or www.digidesign.com



SHANE NICHOLSON AT THE EVELYN

On a cold and rainy Saturday night a few weeks ago I went along to see Shane Nicholson play at the Evelyn Hotel in Fitzroy. It was an all-family affair. Shane was playing with his father-in-law, Bill Chambers, and the two of them played an acoustic set of songs mostly from Shane's new (entirely self-produced and home recorded) album, *Familiar Ghosts*.

Nash Chambers was there too, mixing front of house through the Evelyn's in-house PA. The sound was wide open and crystal clear, Shane's voice sounding particularly vivid, sung through a Neumann KMS105, which nearly always sounds impressive.

I'd been listening to *Familiar Ghosts* all week and was curious to see how the songs would be delivered live. With Shane on vocals, acoustic guitar, harmonica (around his neck), tambourine (under his left foot) and kick stomp (under his right), and Bill on an assortment of instruments including lap steel and mandolin, the night was a smoothly delivered and flawless performance, very much like the record.

Having played the night before up the road at Rod Laver Arena, supporting John Mellencamp and Sheryl Crow, the nights must have seemed starkly contrasted from Shane and Bill's perspective. Not to mention Nash's – mixing in a stadium one night, and a local pub the next. Before the gig, Shane had described "feeling like a matador" the night before: "you go out there and just try and survive for 40 minutes!"

But the main issue at the Evelyn was the inattentive audience. You'd think the audience might be riveted at the Evelyn and perhaps somewhat distracted at Rod Laver Arena – popcorn and merch' in hand – but it was the other way around. It never ceases to amaze me how people pay good money to go to a gig, and then proceed to talk *loudly* over the act on stage. One particular group were so bad that I had to move... twice, just to get away from them. But there was no getting away from them. Both Bill and Shane told them to shut up at various points in the gig, but it was to no avail. A shame really, if it wasn't for them, the night would've been great. *Andy Stewart*

Shane Nicholson's Familiar Ghosts album is out now...