



▲ M-Audio's IE20XB offers portability, flexibility & clarity.

By Nate Sherwood & Jody Amos

This month's entry includes a unique monitoring system and an all-in-one workstation. Connecticut jock Nate Sherwood takes on M-Audio's IE Series of in-ear monitor systems, while Cali mobile Jody Amos handles B-52's ProdigyFX DJ workstation.

M-AUDIO IE SERIES

For years, singers and on-stage performers have relied on in-ear monitor systems (IEMS) for their live gigs. Recently, one of the most respected IEM producers (Ultimate Ears) has teamed up with one of the leaders in DJ/production technology to come up with the M-Audio IE series of professional reference earphones for pro jocks.

The stage-proven Ultimate Ears technology provides two separate chambers driving sound to your ears: One delivers crisp, sparkling highs and buttery mids, while the other provides deep, booming bass. This is the same concept used to deliver rich sound in any professional studio monitor. In-



▲ ProdigyFX: B-52's an all-in-one solution for mobiles & smaller venues.

An Earful & a Workstation

cluded with the IEMs: a ¼-inch converter allowing them to be used with virtually any mixer; an airplane limiter for overload protection; a universal fit kit with a variety of silicone and foam tips; a cleaning tool; and two different travel cases. Each earphone can be fitted with most custom-made earplugs as well.

M-Audio has addressed one of the major concerns when it comes to DJ headphones: repair. Each member of the IE series has a detachable cable which can be simply swapped out for only \$19.95. There are no moving parts so it is nearly impossible to break them with normal use. The metal travel case keeps your investment safe and secure while traveling from gig to gig—plus, these earphones are much smaller and more portable.

Another advantage is that these IE pieces sound just as good plugged into your MP3 player as they do in the club. It's convenient to run around town previewing new music with professional sound, without looking like a person who should be holding cones and guiding a jet onto the runway. It's wonderful to truly hear your music and the IE Series will help you hear every single flaw or hiss in a song without having to test it in a room full of people dancing.

THE TEST DRIVE

At first, it's tough to imagine DJing all night with an earphone stuck in your ear, but these IEMs are amazingly comfortable. (For the review, I used the IE-20XBs.) The pro-style ear loops (flexible metal inserts that wrap around the top of your ear) really hold these pieces in place, and after about 10 minutes, you completely forget that you are wearing them. The sound quality completely surpasses anything that I have ever heard out of traditional DJ headphones. The bass is rich and thick; however, it does not overpower the crisp mids/highs. The sound melds perfectly.

I was a little nervous at first that my mixes might need a little tweaking—but, boy, was I wrong. The clarity from the IE-20XB gives a DJ much more flexibility. You can really work the EQ and make your mixes sound incredible because of the true sound monitoring. The combination of the extended bass and the 16dB noise isola-

tion lets you monitor without being subjected to deafening levels.

Fact is, my only gripe was that the 48-inch cord was a little restricting while in the booth. Still, after initially intending to use them only for a couple of hours, I could not take them off. Also, I was skeptical of the \$249.95 price tag, but after putting them through the ringer, these in-ear monitors are well worth the money. It should also be noted that the IE Series also includes the IE-10 Professional Reference Earphones (\$129.95) and the IE-30 High-Definition Professional Reference Earphones with Dual-Driver Technology (\$299.95). Recommended.

B-52 PRODIGYFX

B-52, the Huntington Park, Calif.-based company well-known for its affordable powered speakers, has expanded into a more dedicated DJ direction with its ProdigyFX all-in-one DJ workstation.

This piece is very well-built and fills a big hole in the DJ industry. I first got a sneak peak of this unit at the '06 International DJ Expo in Atlantic City and I was pretty impressed. So it's safe to say I was excited to get word that I was going to review this system—I just wish they sent me some speakers along with it. Ha!

First, let's look at the physical characteristics of the ProdigyFX. The workstation comes inside an ATA flight case which measures a compact 30 inches wide, 19 inches deep and 8 inches tall—it weighs 48 pounds.



The ProdigyFX is beautiful in appearance with a matte black finish, silver knobs, and graphics—its bright blue displays are very easy to view. The unit features everything a pro DJ seeks in a four-channel VCA mixer: multiple source inputs and a three-band EQ with kill switches, gain control, and VU meter on each channel. KJs should also pay attention here because it includes three microphone inputs using universal XLR and 1/4-inch combo jacks on all three inputs and Mics 1 and 2 conveniently come with reverb control. This mixer also has two built-in CD players that offer two 5-inch touch-sensitive jog wheels on each side for scratching or pitch bending. The decks also include a variety of buttons with many effects and memory banks. It's also equipped with rotary knobs for quickly selecting tracks on your CD or MP3 discs, as well as many other features.

I've been hesitant in the past to buy an all-in-one workstation like this, fearing that I would be doomed if just one part of the unit crashed on me. The B-52 engineers behind this system carefully considered every obstacle and worked around them. A B-52 rep told me to purposely jam a CD inside by blocking it with my hand as I ejected it. After it jammed up, he told me to reset the CD player by holding down the eject button for five seconds. This successfully reset the player by reloading the CD without interrupting the other deck or mixer—this feature's known as IPR, as in "Independent Player Reset." He also pointed out the built-in fan and vents, and explained how the workstation and custom ATA case were designed to keep it from overheating. I have personally experienced the trouble and frustration of overheating units from other manufacturers and know the importance of this feature firsthand.

The more I used this unit the more I found great features that I didn't expect to find. First, it allows you to apply multiple effects to a track while playing CDs or loops. You can perfectly adjust your loops' in and out points, if you don't hit them right on your first try.

You can set three hot starts per CD, you can sample some quick drops or store some loops into one of three memory banks on each deck. The stored loops will save into memory even if you take the CD out and put in a new one. This makes it easy for a DJ to get very creative with his or her sets and take their DJ ability to the next level.

I was also impressed to find that this workstation has CD-direct outputs allowing me to hook up my Serato Box (or any other software system for that matter) for my laptop and time-coded CDs. I was extremely happy to find this feature, so I can use my favorite

B-52's engineers behind this system carefully considered every obstacle and worked around them.

program but still take my CDs or MP3 discs with me. Unfortunately, the effects or looping features will not work with Serato, as the effects are built to work directly with the CD players and not the mixer—but you

can still scratch and pitch bend with the jog dial.

This unit has many more features than I can possibly list. I highly recommend checking out their website (www.prodigyfx.com) for com-

plete information, photos, video demos and more. Overall, I am extremely happy with this unit and many of my DJ's are, too. It has performed perfectly at our events and we haven't experienced any flaws in this system. At \$1199.99 (MAP with case), this workstation is priced extremely well and I can see everyone from bedroom DJs, mobile KJs/DJs and small club or bar jocks using this system. Good job on your introductory unit, B-52—very well done!

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