

# ProAudio Review

The Review Resource for Sound Professionals

REPRINTED FROM JUNE 2007

WWW.PROAUDIOREVIEW.COM

## Marshall MXL604 Microphone

At under \$200, the MXL604 and its two capsules are quite a bargain.

by Rob Tavaglione

I'm hardly a fan of inexpensive Chinese-made condensers, so I approached the new MXL604 (\$179) with skepticism. Upon finding both cardioid and omni capsules accompanied each 604, my inner bargain-hunter instinct prevailed and the shootout began.

### | FEATURES

The follow up to Marshall's previous MXL603, the MXL604 is a transformerless, small-diaphragm pressure-gradient condenser mic with interchangeable 20 mm capsules. Each mic "kit" includes the mic, a blonde wood and velvet-lined carrying case, mic clip, windscreens and two capsules. The mic has a satin-silver finish and clean, black-etched engravings for its only adjustment point: a three-position sliding switch for high-pass filter, 10 dB pad or bypass.

### | IN USE

First up is the factory-recommended ambient drum application. I utilized a pair of the 604s for ride cymbal and high hat when recording a rock 'n' roll cover band, Roxic. I'm often a fan of omnis for these two positions — placed a couple of feet back from the kit — to minimize unwanted phase interaction with nearby cymbals and overheads. But I often find small diaphragm con-

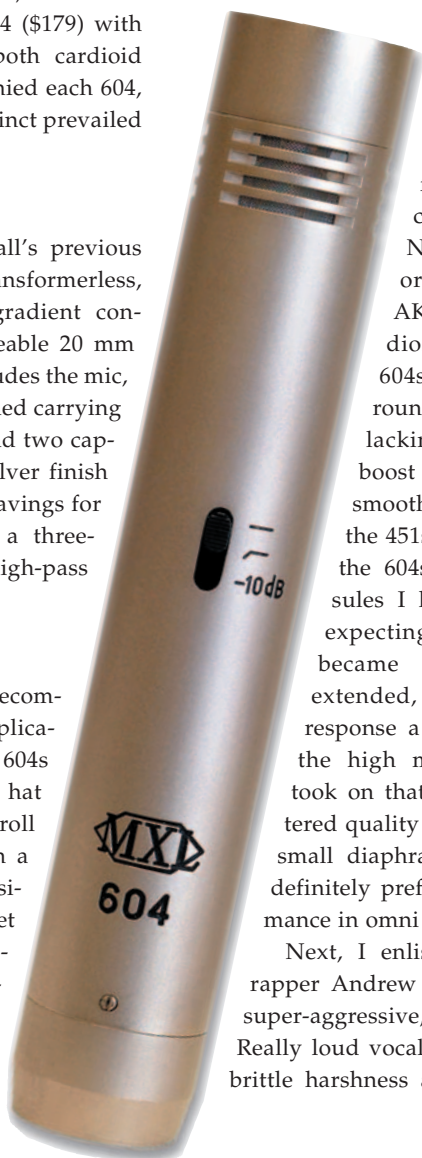
densers a bit "pingy" and sharp. Here, the omni 604s were surprisingly full and deep, with bottom end that was getting some nice, full-sounding leakage from toms. When compared to Neumann KM184s or the traditional AKG C451s (with cardioid capsules), the 604s were noticeably rounder and fuller, but lacking the presence boost of the 184s or the smooth, uncolored top of the 451s. Upon switching the 604s to cardioid capsules I heard what I was expecting. The bottom became leaner and less extended, the frequency response a touch "peaky" in the high mids and leakage took on that slightly comb-filtered quality typical with many small diaphragm condensers. I definitely preferred their performance in omni over cardioid.

Next, I enlisted straight-edge rapper Andrew Higgins for some super-aggressive, hardcore yelling. Really loud vocals often expose the brittle harshness and off-axis nasti-

ness of cardioids, so I was hoping for some omni smoothness and lack of proximity effect. Here, the 604s really shined, getting nice roominess, making the yelling more palatable and distinctive. The bottom was pleasantly full and the top never strident. A quick, and unpleasant, test in cardioid confirmed my instincts.

And, finally, a great test of a condenser's finesse: acoustic guitar. I set up my trusty Taylor dreadnought with a stereo ORTF configuration, an acoustic guitar favorite. Here, the 604s in cardioid were crisp, defined and had plenty of output. I then switched to omni and stayed ORTF — wrong, I know, but stay with me — and heard a huge difference. The bottom was quite large — too large, really — with the top and mids understated.

I then tried a pair of KM184s and C451s, both in ORTF. The 451s were the smoothest of the three, with the 184s having the best imaging and the most defined top end. In fact, the 604s in cardioid were a lot like the 184s — a bit forward sounding and lean in the bottom — although they didn't have quite the off-axis smoothness or detailed



## FAST FACTS

### APPLICATIONS

Studio

### KEY FEATURES

Includes cardioid and omni capsules, wooden box and accessories

### PRICE

\$179

### CONTACT

Marshall Electronics |  
☎ 310-333-0606  
🌐 www.mxlamics.com

imaging. Surprisingly, output levels were identical, quite hot in my opinion. With about 42dB of gain at the preamp, the 604 did have a bit of a noise floor compared to the Neumann. Still, not bad for a sixth the price!

I then set a spaced omni configuration with high-pass filters and was delighted. There was better imaging, a smooth top, round, yet tight, bottom and only a little room "air." I could use this acoustic sound in most pop or rock mix.

The MXL 604s, even if quite flexible and utilitarian, could use some better accessorizing. The mic clips were thin and flimsy and won't survive a clumsy intern. The

windscreens were also a bit thin and only moderately effective. And I could imagine the three-position switches — with their weak and imprecise feel — failing quickly if frequently employed.

Upon closer inspection, I found the omni capsules nearly cardioid using the old "check-check" rotation. They sounded only a little more open than the cardioids and were clearly different in their frequency response, but they were more like soft – or wide – cardioids.

#### | SUMMARY

The MXL604s are probably not your first grab for really hi-fi work, but all in all,

to get this much flexibility from a pair of small condensers for about \$200 street is too good of a bargain to pass up. Use the cardioid caps to brighten up dull sources and the omnis to smooth out harsh ones and you've got a mic pair to handle any number of stereo applications. Plan on replacing the clips and accessories for serious use.

*Rob Tavaglione is owner of Catalyst Recording in Charlotte, NC, teacher of college level audio courses at CPCC and mixer for the Charlotte Bobcats (NBA) and Sting (WNBA). Contact him at [rob@catalystrecording.com](mailto:rob@catalystrecording.com).*