

Making It Fit



The Embrace microphone system from Point Source Audio offers easy adjustment into new configurations.

Taking the Point Source Audio Embrace mic rig onstage

When the brand-new musical is called *Presto Change-O*—and is about a family of magicians, and a member of the creative team is an illusionist—you almost need a magic trick to choose the microphone too. The mic would need to be tiny enough to not interfere with illusions, secure enough to stay in place during the illusions—and, oh yeah, capture voices magically as well. To run this gauntlet, I turned to the new Embrace microphone from Point Source Audio.

The Gear

To quote the manufacturer, Embrace microphones are “custom-fit ear-mounted lavalier solutions.” They use a Series8 lavalier mic element combined with a bendable and trimmable rig so you can create form-fitting earmounts in no time flat.

My first exposure to Embrace was on the USITT conference floor in Salt Lake City, where I was prompted to try on the rig myself. This was not unusual for me. Many years ago I developed the practice of trying on microphone rigs I asked actors to wear. It gives me insight into their experience and makes it easier for me to make them comfortable. The normal procedure of a fixed ear mount or wire always bothered me. It was either too stiff or poked at the back of my ear. But when I put on the Embrace, the first thing I noticed was that I barely felt it. It hugged the back of my ear securely without the use of tape or clips. So I felt good about putting Embrace on an actor and them being comfortable after this experience.

I was also pleased that I would get to use the PSA Series 8 lavaliers with the Embrace rig. They integrate into the Embrace perfectly and are easily adjustable. Their max SPL and frequency response are fantastic. The great sound they deliver makes having the Embrace a welcomed addition knowing the microphone placement would always be consistent. With all this in mind, I arranged to have a couple sent to me to use on *Presto* to see what they were like off the show floor and on the stage.

Out of the box, the rig is very straightforward. Barrington Stage Company Sound Supervisor Cory Raynor and the A1, Matthew Birchmeier, were able to grasp the rig immediately. And even if they didn't, the included instructions are clear, easy to read and understand.

The material the Embrace is made from is soft, bendable and holds a shape. You simply trim the bottom of the rig with wire cutters based on the actor's ear size. There is a soft cap for the cut end that slides on so there aren't any sharp edges. The slot to trench the lavalier wire through is easily accessible and installing the microphone in it is quick and simple. We all really liked how the wire exited the rig. Frequently, rigs have the wire exit at the bottom, making it

much more visible to the audience. This effect is amplified when the actor turns their head and the wire sticks way out. With the Embrace, the wire is designed to exit towards the back of the rig, making it stream-lined to work into hair or attach to the back of the neck. It's a nice touch.

The Actors

Broadway veterans Lenny Wolpe (*Wicked*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*) and Bob Walton (*42nd Street*) were my choices to wear Embrace. Both have worn a wireless microphone thousands of times. Their insight and experience would be invaluable.

Fitting the rigs on the actors was very simple. After a few trims and bending of the rig, the fit was perfect. Each rig held its shape the entirety of the four-week run. Lenny Wolpe remarked that he didn't even notice it was there after his fitting and Bob Walton noted that it was comfortable, clear and easy to wear.

When an actor is comfortable and happy with their microphone rig, they have one less thing to worry about during the show. This translates to a better performance and them feeling more confident in their sound team.

With Bob Walton's rig, we started to discover that his specific ear anatomy and a costume piece in the show were at odds. In one scene, he entered with a full-head-covering ski mask and proceeded to take it off in the scene. His ear lobes were small and if he ripped the mask off on the other side of his head, it could pull the rig off his ear. We adjusted his blocking with how he took off the mask and added a clip into his hair to solve the issue. In hindsight, we should have spent more time in the fitting process to ensure it could wrap around the bottom of his ear and fit even more securely. It is clear that the Embrace would have handled it fine if we had made a better fit or switched to use the second earmount (for the other ear) that comes in each kit.

I would specify Embrace in the future. It is a great product that solves a frequent problem: comfortable and reliable ear rigs. Its sonic performance and resistance to sweat-outs makes it a great choice for any situation. With microphone placements just a few centimeters apart sometimes making a big difference, Embrace will hold the same position, night after night. I know that when I have to leave after opening night, the show will sound the same throughout the run. **SD**



The Point Source Audio Embrace mic system on Bob Walton...



... and on Lenny Wolpe