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MARCH 2016

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POINT SOURCE CM-i3 Intercom Headset

Intercom headsets are the unsung heroes of live production. They get used, abused, tossed aside, and not given another thought until the next event. Every standard issue headset I have ever used was pretty much bullet-proof. Because of the abuse they get put through, they have to be. As a result, they are typically built like tanks—large and heavy. Every new design seems to offer modest, incremental improvements. No one has ever redefined the category. Clear-Com came really close when it added the field swappable interface cable and integrated mute switch on the CC-300. I remember thinking at the time, “This is as good as it gets.”

Not so fast. All of the intercom headsets with the best form, function, and features are big bulky heavyweights. They have to be; it’s the only way to fit all the functionality and features onboard. Point Source Audio is out to change expectations with its new CM-i3 intercom headset. Coming in at just 2

THE CM-i3 OFFERS A GREAT BALANCE OF NOISE ISOLATION WHEN YOU NEED IT AND THE ABILITY TO HEAR THE AMBIENT SOUNDS WHEN YOU DON'T.

REVIEWER / MARK HANNA

ounces, this super light featherweight packs a lot of punch. Its patent-pending design and innovative use of standard ear buds make the CM-i3 a real contender.

HEAD-TURNING TRAITS

One of the most notable features of the CM-i3 is the lack of large circumaural (over the ear) or supra-aural (on the ear) ear pads that most standard intercom headsets use. Instead it features ear buds that can block out -25 dB of background noise. There are multiple applications where this design out performs many of its predecessors—most notably in

loud environments. This is great for onstage camera ops who need both ears covered to reduce stage noise in order to hear the director, but who can’t afford to have a huge ear pad between the side of their head and the side of the camera. In this application, the CM-i3 fits comfortably around the head and holds tight so it won’t fall off when the user is bending over or moving around.

The headset itself is best described as an over-the-ear, behind-the-head style that is similar to the microphones fitness instructors use. Its small design also makes it great for

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stage hands and producers, because by removing one of the ear buds you can quickly reintroduce room noise, which is sometimes critical for hitting cues. The CM-i3 offers a great balance of noise isolation when you need it and the ability to hear the ambient sounds when you don't.

The headset's boom mic is a dynamic design with a cardioid pattern and a frequency response of 300 Hz-10,000 Hz. It is mounted to the headset with a flexible goose-neck-like design and can be swapped to either side. The CM-i3 can also be configured to match up to almost any intercom system including: 3.5mm for iOS apps, XLR 4M for RTS mono systems, XLR 4F for Clear-Com systems, XLR 5M for mono Telex systems, XLR 5M for Stereo RTS systems, and XLR 5F for Telex systems.

While the CM-i3's modular design features Point Source Audio EM-3 in-ear monitors (IEM), it can be used with any ear buds or even custom-molded IEMs. This increases the life and usability of the product.

Another benefit is the connector that interfaces the standard 3.5-mm plug into the intercom connector of choice. It can quickly be uncoupled and plugged into any other audio source, defeating the microphone but allowing the ear buds to function as designed. This is a great feature for FOH operators who need to be able to listen to their sound boards, ambient room noise, and intercom all at the same time. A deft FOH operator could quickly bounce between the soundboard and the intercom just by changing the 3.5-mm connection from the CM-i3 to the headphone connection on their soundboard. Also, for those really long days, it would be easy to leave the intercom on, change the connection, and listen to your iPod while you are waiting for the next service to begin.

INTO ACTION

For this review I used the CM-i3 while directing an in-house corporate broadcast. After three hours the ear buds were a little uncomfortable, but the sound quality was amazing and noise cancelling offered a substantial improvement to the standard issue headset we had on the job that day. In addition, because of the behind-the-ear, lightweight design, I didn't suffer from the intercom hair-do I usually get when directing.

The lightweight design was very comfortable and appears to be quite durable. The mic and ear buds also produce excellent sound quality. The only thing that appears to be missing is some type of mute button.

If you want to breathe life into an old intercom system or are simply in the market for a new intercom headset, I strongly suggest looking at the new lightweight Point Source Audio CM-i3.

MARK HANNA is a regular contributor to *Church Production Magazine*. 

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