

DPA Ultimate Recording Kit

Microphone Collection

DPA's new flagship mic bundle offers quality and quantity in abundance. We put it to work in a busy studio...

NEIL ROGERS

Danish company DPA Microphones have a reputation for producing high-quality capacitor microphones, and I think it's fair to say that these are most visible in live, classical, theatre and broadcast environments. As an engineer who works almost entirely in the recording studio, I haven't always considered them an option when assessing new microphone purchases. Nor have I often come across DPA mics in other studios that I've used over the years. My lack of exposure to their mics ended in spectacular fashion with this review, however, as I got to take a look at their Ultimate Recording Kit mic



collection. Spread over three immaculately organised tiers in a large Pelican-style flightcase, the collection contains more than 30 microphones alongside several modular capsule options, numerous attachment clips, mounting hardware, stereo bars and most other tools you could possibly require for close/spot-miking duties as well as stereo capture of large ensembles.

We've reviewed many of these mics before, so I'm not going to attempt to cover the entire collection in detail. Instead, this review will be more of a whistle-stop tour, with a focus on the mics that I found especially useful in my studio.

From The Top

The first layer of the collection is focused around DPA's 4099 instrument microphones — 10 of them, in fact. These are full-range, miniature capacitor mics attached to flexible gooseneck arms. The 4099s are designed for close-miking instruments without the need for cumbersome stands, cables or mounting, and the collection includes a selection of clamps and clips catering for a wide range of instruments such as drums, cello, acoustic guitars, piano and brass. Featuring a supercardioid polar pattern, the standard 4099 has an SPL rating of 142dB, and this collection includes four of those,



■ The top layer includes no fewer than 10 of DPA's celebrated 4099 mics, plus mounting hardware for a variety of string, woodwind and brass instruments.

plus six of the 'extreme' option which can cope with a whopping 153dB SPL.

It takes a while to get used to handling the mics, and the miniature cabling in particular can be a little challenging for fatter fingers! Once you have your desired mount figured out, however, the 4099s offer a highly convenient way of getting a quality mic not only close to but also attached to an instrument. I had great success using them for acoustic guitar on a live video session I was doing at the studio, and quickly got very used to using them on toms when recording drums. I didn't get a chance to try every mount, but I liked the double bass option (for positioning on the strings between the bridge and the tailpiece), and generally the whole system seems very well thought-out. Given the convenience of these small mics, it's not hard to see what they are so popular with live and theatre engineers, but I found them very useful indeed in the studio. In close-miking situations where you might typically use quite a coloured-sounding dynamic mic, it can sometimes be a little disorientating to be presented with a more neutral, full-range sound. It's definitely preferable for me, however, to be able to EQ out anything that isn't needed, rather than trying to compensate for something that a mic hasn't captured at the source.

Middle Earth

The second layer of the collection contains no fewer than four matched pairs of DPA's

flagship 4000-series pencil-style mics, alongside pairs of smaller preamp options from the same part of DPA's range. There's a lot to talk about here, but I'm going to focus on explaining the significance of the modular capsules within this family of mics. The stereo pairs of pencil mics I mentioned all have the same MMP-A preamplifier section, which is a transformerless design intended to be used with a variety of capsules. There are also two other preamp options included in this section, which can all be used with the same range of capsules. These additional preamps include four of the MMP-C preamp options, which are smaller and more affordable if bought individually. If you need an even smaller footprint there are two MMP-ER preamps, which come attached to a long XLR cable for hanging or generally getting into hard-to-reach places.

As already mentioned, any of these bodies can be used with the same group of capsules. Included here are omni, cardioid, supercardioid and wide cardioid options, as well as four of DPA's more affordable 2011c twin-diaphragm cardioid capsules. In use, swapping the capsules out is very easy indeed, and the high quality of the engineering can be immediately felt when screwing or unscrewing them. When I used any of the larger pencil-style mics in a stereo configuration, the lifelike quality of the sound coming out of the speakers in my control room was simply stunning. I auditioned the different capsule options as drum overheads and above an upright

DPA Ultimate Recording Kit

£36,700

PROS

- A varied and extensive collection of high-end DPA microphones.
- DPA's modular preamp and capsule system is very well conceived and engineered.
- 4099 gooseneck mics offer a convenient way of close-miking a variety of instruments.
- The pencil mics sound stunningly pristine and 'lifelike'.
- Live vocal mics do their job very well indeed.
- Huge range of mounting and accessory options included.

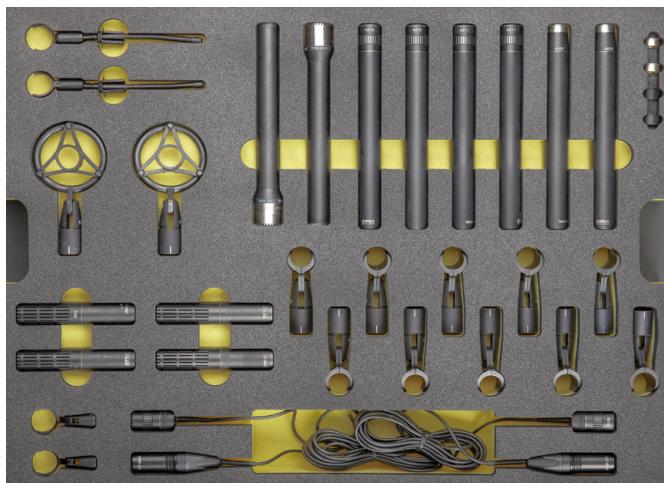
CONS

- The quality of this collection is reflected in the price.

SUMMARY

The DPA Ultimate Recording Kit is an extensive collection of high-end capacitor microphones and accessories, many optimised for recording a huge variety of instruments. With both clip-on and modular pencil mics, it gives you pretty much everything you might need to produce high-quality, lifelike recordings both live and in the studio.

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■ In the middle, we have a selection of 2011, 4011, 4041, 4015 and 4018 small-diaphragm capacitor models, plus mounting hardware.



■ The bottom tier houses two live vocal capacitor mics (a d:facto and a 2028) and a pair of 4018V capsules, plus more mounting hardware and accessories, including a wide stereo bar.

» piano and felt a bit spoilt for choice when considering the relative differences. I tended to prefer the more directional options above the drum kit, but the omni mics sounded seriously good on piano, or when used as more of a room/ambience option. The 4015 wide cardioid capsules are worthy of a special mention, as it's not a typical polar pattern but seems to offer a great 'best of both worlds' option. They sounded great on drums and placed in front of a double bass or acoustic guitar, providing clean transients and a highly accurate, but smooth, picture of what was in front of the microphone.

Lastly, there is also a pair of DPA's 4041 larger-diaphragm mics, which are I think unique for the brand. The 24mm omni capsule is the largest in the DPA range and thus offers very low self-noise. These are extremely high-end mics with an individual price the other side of £3000, and whilst I got to try them against the other mics and was suitably impressed, I didn't feel I used them enough to offer a helpful opinion on the subjective differences.

Bottom Line

After the dizzying selection of high-quality mics found in the middle layer, the bottom section is, for the most part, about offering more accessory options. There's a high-quality stereo bar alongside different mounting and windshield options for various mics throughout the collection. Nestled in between, however, we have two of DPAs d:facto live vocal mics, offering a high-end live vocal option with swappable capsules: see our review at www.soundonsound.com/reviews/dpa-dfacto-ii. Lastly there's DPAs non-modular 2028, another premium live

vocal mic which has a supercardioid polar pattern. I got a chance to try these vocal mics on a few different 'live video' tracking sessions, and in a very loud room I was impressed not only with how directional the mics were, but also with how any spill that was coming into the mics — from cymbals in particular — sounded much nicer than when using my usual handheld options.

Summing Up

Although the Ultimate Studio Kit is technically a product that can be bought, a formidable collection of high-end mics like this has, not surprisingly, an equally formidable price tag that is going to put it out of reach for most small-scale studios, theatres or production facilities. However, for organisations that have larger budgets and want an instant high-end mic collection, this would be a great option.

Aside from explaining what is included in this bundle, I hope I've provided an introduction to DPA's mics to those who are new to them, and a taste of how they fared in a varied recording studio environment. A smaller studio like mine wouldn't be able to buy this whole collection, but I quickly appreciated how several of the included mics are better alternatives to the more 'workhorse' models that get used on most recording sessions. Many widely used studio mics are not what you would call transparent, especially when used for close-miking. Indeed, I often found it a bit disorientating when I substituted one of the DPA mics for my usual choice on a familiar source — a 4099 or 2011c instead of an SM57 on a snare drum, for example. What you get is the sound of the source, rather than the combination of the source

Rolling Updates

This kit is not a 'static' product; rather, it's intended as an ongoing showcase of DPA's line-up, so as their line-up changes, so will the kit. For example, as we were going to press we learnt that DPA will soon be releasing a new range of small-diaphragm 'pencil' mics, which will eventually replace two of the 2011 models found here. The next kit update will also include DPA's 4055 kick-drum mic.

and microphone. Also, any non-direct sound that is captured, such as spill, can actually sound quite nice! I found this pleasantly challenging as an engineer, and it made me work a bit harder, listening and then fine-tuning placement to get the spill sounding right, rather than always feeling I had to work to get rid of it when mixing.

I think that every good studio should offer some options microphone-wise. That means that as well as more coloured, characterful choices — such as the classic dynamic, ribbon and tube mics — you want some more honest, pristine mics that can capture exactly what is happening in the room. This is what the range of DPA pencil mics did so well in my studio during the review period. Thanks to the pure sound and the problem-solving options for attaching small high-quality mics to instruments or hanging into a piano, it's been a real pleasure to have them at my studio. ■■■

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