

Studio Spotlight: The Vocal Production Studio of CJ Goodearl

RECORDING

The magazine for the recording musician®

Vocals!

- Great Vocals at Home
- Plosives, Sibilance & Proximity Effect
- Recording & Mixing Background Vocals

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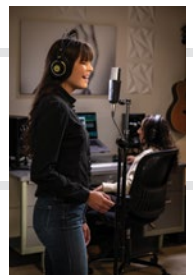
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REVIEW



Schoeps Desert Island Stereo Set—MK 4 Capsules

An ultra-compact stereo microphone set of the highest order

REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

We all know the classic thought game: “If you were stranded on a desert island, which top five albums, movies or books would you bring?” But what about microphones? Setting aside issues like electricity and phantom power, Schoeps now offers its own answer to that question with the new user-configurable Schoeps Desert Island Stereo Set.

German-Made Modular Classics

Handmade in Germany since the late 1940s and early 1950s, Schoeps microphones are both well respected and ubiquitous in orchestral music, film scoring and location recording. Even more interesting, while often taken for granted today, Schoeps was a pioneer in modular small-diaphragm microphone design—beginning with the CMC modular system in 1965 and culminating in the Colette Series launched in 1973, which remains in production today.

By modular, I am referring to a microphone system where you choose an active amplifier body—sized and spec'd to your needs—and pair it with a screw-on capsule in the polar pattern and configuration best suited for the recording task at hand.

For reference, the Colette Series currently offers nine amplifier bodies and a remarkably broad capsule selection: four omni, two cardioid, one wide cardioid, one open cardioid, two supercardioid, one figure-8, eight close-pickup variants, one shotgun capsule, one boundary-layer

capsule and a dual-pattern cardioid/omni capsule—23 options in total.

Relevant to this review, nine of these capsules are available when configuring your Desert Island Stereo Set.

In the Kit

The kit itself is straightforward and simple, comprising two small-scale CMC 1 U amplifier bodies, two capsules of your choice—in this review, the popular (and arguably classic) MK 4 cardioid capsule—and a pair of high-quality pliable mic clips, all nestled cozily in a compact 5.5" (w) × 2" (t) × 4" (d) Pelican case. It even includes a carabiner-style belt clip.

As a true stereo set, it also includes a certificate of stereo matching.

CMC 1 U Amplifier

Introduced in 1999, the CMC 1 U amplifier body is essentially a miniature version of the standard CMC 6—measuring only 1.4" × 0.8"—yet offering the same sonic performance in a far smaller footprint.

MK 4 Cardioid Capsule

The MK 4 is the most popular Schoeps capsule, and I expect it will be the most common choice for the Desert Island configuration as well.

The MK 4 is a 22 mm × 20 mm capsule with a gently frequency-dependent cardioid pattern that narrows in the higher frequencies. It is known for its natural, balanced sound and its versatility across a wide range of acoustic sources.

The final thing I want to point out is that when assembled, the mic measures a petite 2.6" in length.

Smooth Neutral Sonics

On paper and in practice, the CMC 1 U/MK 4 combination falls squarely into the classic, ruler-flat, ultra-honest small-diaphragm category—one of the main reasons it has been a go-to choice for classical recording for decades. It offers a gentle, gradual rolloff beginning around 190 Hz and reaching roughly -4dB at 50 Hz. From there, the response is remarkably flat, interrupted only by a small, broad ~1dB rise between 6 kHz and 8 kHz. Beyond that, the mic stays solid and linear all the way to 20 kHz and beyond.

In use, this matters because many modern small-diaphragm microphones lean on a pronounced presence peak to create an impression of added clarity—what we often interpret as “realism,” even if it is mainly brightness. To avoid sounding overly “tizzy,” those designs typically introduce an early high-frequency rolloff around 18–20 kHz.

By contrast, the Schoeps approach simply captures the highs as they exist, without any additional sculpting. The result is an effortless, natural top end that does not call attention to itself—and does not need to.

In Use

All in all, the CMC 1 U/MK 4 combo falls into the neutral slice-of-reality camp, but I used the word *classic* earlier to highlight that this neutrality is never clinical, stark or overly “ultra-transparent.” Because its high end avoids the presence boost found in many modern small-diaphragm designs, it can almost come across as smooth and rich. However, thanks to its extended top-end reach, it never feels rolled off or rounded either.

Off-axis rejection is tight yet tonally balanced, with no extreme dips or odd EQ behavior. Sounds arriving from the sides

are quieter, but still natural. Proximity effect is minimal—only becoming noticeable within 2" of the capsule—and the overall tonality remains consistent whether the source is inches away or several feet out.

This is why the MK 4 capsule in particular has been so popular for years for stereo arrays on strings, choirs, full orchestras and room pickup, as well as for spot-miking individual instruments.

In my own studio, I do not record orchestral instruments often—aside from the occasional string trio or quartet on a pop track, or solo cello or fiddle on Americana, folk or Celtic sessions. My friend, GRAMMY-nominated classical engineer and educator Mary Mazurek, does this work regularly, and she has long been a fan of Schoeps microphones and the MK 4 capsule specifically. I remember sitting in on several small-diaphragm shootouts in her classes, and the MK 4 (I believe paired with a CMC 6 body) won darn near every time.

Over the past few months, I have used the CMC 1 U/MK 4—both alone and in stereo—on a variety of sources: acoustic guitars, mandolin, congas, front-of-cajón, jangly hand percussion and drum overheads. They have yet to let me down. My

favorite application has been as a spaced-pair overhead set, where they capture the kit in full, glorious detail. Acoustic guitar, both mono and stereo, was a close second; these mics shine both up close and at a distance, especially in well-behaved rooms.

One note typical of many sensitive small-diaphragm condensers: the mics can react strongly to air movement. Use a pop filter for close vocals and be mindful of players breathing when spot-miking guitars or violins.

Wrap Up

The MK 4-based Schoeps Desert Island Stereo Set more than lives up to its name. There is virtually no source a pair of these cannot excel on, and they could easily serve as your one-and-only set of high-end utility small-diaphragm condensers for decades to come. This is classic German engineering at its finest. ➔

Price: \$3,756 (as configured)
More From: schoeps.de

CMC 1 U Amplifier

Frequency range:.....20 Hz–20 kHz
Max output voltage:..... 1.8 V (5dBV) with 1 kΩ load
Max SPL:.....135dB SPL (P48) with the MK 4
Low-cut filter:.....20 Hz, 12dB/oct
Output impedance:..... 50 Ω ± 1 Ω (8 Hz–50 kHz)
Minimum recommended load impedance: 1 kΩ
Common-mode rejection ratio:.....>55dB (at 1 kHz)

MK 4 Cardioid Capsule

Frequency range:.....up to 40 Hz-41 kHz (amplifier dependent)
Sensitivity:.....–36.5dB (V/Pa), 15 mV/Pa
Equivalent noise: 14dB (A), 24dB (CCIR)
Signal-to-noise:.....80dB (A)
Max SPL:..... 135dB (with CMC 1)



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Now, make the room for the Swarm™ - a single backspace unit, hand-built in the USA, with four independent Mic/DI channels that takes the Hornet to a whole new level. Sonically, the Swarm delivers the same huge sound as the Hornet, but its rackmount form factor makes room for extra features including a high pass filter, 22dB pad and phase control. Like the Hornet, Swarm features discrete gain cell topology, a custom Cinemag input transformer, and a JFET DI. Dial in the Color control, and the personality of your microphone or instrument is enhanced and thickened without the need for compression or EQ.

Preamps in interfaces are everywhere, but they don't have much of a sound. The Swarm makes your music sound like a record even before it hits the interface. If you're looking for a versatile front end that can handle a whole drum kit, or a combination of microphones, bass, guitar and keyboards, it's here. And it's affordable.

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