Is it Time to Trade in your Taping Gear for a Minidisc Setup?

By Aeve Baldwin and Tyson Schuetze

Where Are You, Mini-disc?

Part of this marketing—MDs were originally pushed by Sony (its originator, circa 1992) as a replacement for CDs. The utter failure of this approach (and the savvy to know that it was still onto something) was that Sony up quickly, and it repurposed MDs as complements to CDs and cassette tapes. Compared to tapes there’s no, well, comparison: the sound quality of an MD is infinitely better, there’s less peripheral noise and, being digital, users can not only interface their MD systems with different components, recordings can also be easily edited. Don’t want a track? Delete. Want to get rid of the dead space at the beginning of your live show recording? Delete again. Move a track? No problem.

An early criticism of MDs—that the discs only have 80 minutes of recording time—is no longer relevant as newer models have four different recording modes: mono, regular, and two different MDLP settings that, like VCRs, allow users to record up to 160 minutes (LP2) or 320 minutes (LP4) with an 80-minute disc, in essence letting recorders “stretched” on an 80 minute disc (with slight deterioration in sound quality rising with the higher settings). A final MD attribute is its durability. While it’s impossible that anyone has adequately tested Sony's assertion that a MiniDisc may be recorded "a million times," Bob Crawford, a musician and MiniDisc user as well as an employee of MicSupply.com, an online MD resource, reports that they “have never seen, experienced, or heard a customer with the experience, of wearing out a disc.”

Wherefore Art Thou, Mini-disc?

What are people doing with MDs today? Because of MiniDisc's small size, MDs are often used in portable systems such as Walkman, Audiovox, and Aiwa, which are usually used by the public for recording music, such as live shows. Sony MZR900DPC is the top-of-the-line US model, the MZG750DPC, and the one US model featuring a radio, the MZR700DPC.

MDMT877 is the only one with this option. The MZG900DPC offers the advantage of digital test dubbing, a backlit remote for viewing adjustments while recording live shows, a smaller size, and an additional external battery pack. The Japanese model MZ-N1 is designed to be used by people who do not have access to a computer. The MZG900DPC is by far the most sophisticated, allowing users to download songs from a PC at 32 times real speed and adjust recording levels on the fly. It has countless other options but is far beyond the scope of this model: this model takes a little work and is not immediately user-friendly. The sound quality of MiniDiscs is the best in the world, and the quality of live recordings are most affected by the type of microphone used. The quality of your sound will depend on how well you use the MD and the quality of your equipment.

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