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REVIEW: Elite Core Audio Personal Monitoring System

Oh my goodness! I have to say, I have been very anxious to test out this new personal monitor system from Elite Core Audio... ever since I first saw it advertised in Worship Musician Magazine. I just so happen to be in a position that I need a personal monitor system for my team and I wanted to get my hands on this before I made my final decision. If you attended CMS, you may know I have been teaching classes on how to utilize a click track using Ableton Live on the worship platform... in order to do that, some type of in-ear monitor system is most certainly needed. Last week, Chris Ward, one of the innovators behind this system, drove down to South Louisiana from Arkansas to show me how it works!

In music, we often see products rise to the “top” and practically become “industry standard” and it becomes very difficult for that standard to change. However, even among similar products, many opinions come into play... (just like with pickup trucks in the South!). I’ve used other personal monitor systems and was completely blown away by this one. Clarity and power were very impressive. I would forecast the “industry standard” changing soon!

The basic components needed are similar in the personal monitor market. From your FOH board signal comes out of the direct outs or the insert points into an input module. The Input Module from Elite Core Audio includes (+4/-10 dB) pad control for *each individual* channel. The input module connects via CAT-5e to the Distribution Module on the platform. This unit will send power to eight PM-16 units (personal monitors). Just like with other systems, more personal monitor units can be chained with CAT5 and use their own power source. These are similarities in setup to other systems... the difference is what you can **hear** in the PM-16!

Look at the PM-16. At first glance, differences are quickly noticed... individual *Volume* and *Pan* controls for each of the sixteen channels / Signal present light for each channel / Ambient mic with volume control / Compression and EQ controls / Rugged metal housing / Neutrik Ethercon connectors (use either standard CAT5 or the rugged Neutrik connector) / LED meters to show combined channel levels / Headphone *as well as* LINE-outs... WOW!

Chris hooked me up with a multi-track recording in Ableton Live and gave me a couple of pointers and then I began to build my mix. Start with all volumes on “Zero,” turn the master volume up to about 75% and then begin adding volume to individual channels beginning with the instruments most important for me to hear

(Starting with the master volume at 75% leaves a ton of headroom for control. The master control is *after* the volume meter... so, as long as the lights are not clipping red, you can turn up with NO distortion). It was amazing the amount of volume *with* clarity I was able to get out of this unit. It can seem scary stating how loud it can get when we're talking about in-ears... we surely don't want to damage our hearing. BUT, if you've used in-ear monitors before... often, when you can't hear your instrument or vocal well, it's easy to start raising volumes. With the clarity of the Elite Core Audio system, I believe we'll ultimately be pumping *less* volume into our ears.

In my previous experience, I needed to add a wireless transmitter to my system and just was unable get a strong enough signal through that little headphone out to drive the transmitter. It caused me to raise the volume on my body pack very high (and ultimately caused me to purchase a much more expensive rackmount version of the monitor). The PM-16 has *line outs* which would be a better choice to drive a wireless transmitter or powered monitor... whatever you'd need to send a full signal to. In addition, the headphone amp used in the PM-16 is top of the line (very powerful) and will power any headphones.

While testing the unit, I had a nice mix going and Chris reached over, turned up the ambient mic volume, and spoke to me... How pleasant it was to actually hear someone speak with my 'ears' on! Remembering how often I would have to only speak into my microphone when addressing my worship team because everyone was wearing earphones. Problem solved!

As I mentioned before, the positive differences in the PM-16 alone make this unit stand apart in so many ways. The fact that this Elite Core Audio system is so sensibly priced is just, as we'd say in Louisiana, *lagniappe (something extra)*! Components: -IM-16 input module has a MAP of \$629 -DM-8 Distribution Module has a MAP of \$329 -PM-16 Personal Mixer has a MAP of \$429. Some fantastic, affordable accessories will be coming available as well.