

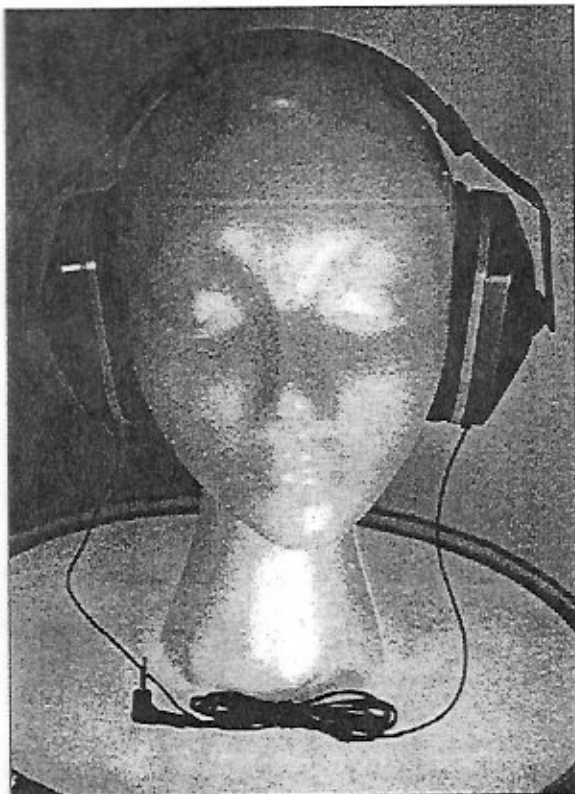
DrumPhones

by Rick Van Horn

Here's a nifty new practice accessory that might very well help you improve your playing and preserve your hearing at the same time. Gordy Knudtsen (drummer for the Steve Miller Band and director of the percussion program at Music Tech in Minneapolis) wanted to practice on his drums while listening to music at the same time—and not go deaf doing it. He found a set of highly effective hearing protection headphones—similar to those you see airport mechanics wearing—and had them fitted with *Walkman*-style earphones. Thus, *DrumPhones* were born.

I like the fact that these headphones were designed from the perspective of hearing protection *first*, and audio transmission *second*. Most of the high-quality, closed-ear stereo headphones I've ever tried to practice with were incapable of really blocking out the live drum sound effectively. (They weren't designed for that purpose, after all.) As a result, I had to turn the music volume up pretty high in order to hear the music over the drums. This defeated the entire purpose of reducing the overall volume (drums and music) coming into my ears.

DrumPhones, on the other hand, effectively reduce the overall level of outside sound by approximately 20 db—a significant amount. They also dramatically reduce high-mid to high frequencies (meaning snare and cymbals) while seeming to “enhance” low-end (toms and bass drum). For practice purposes this is excellent, since a constant barrage of cymbals and high-end snare crack can cause unprotected ears to shut down very quickly—thus making you want to turn the music up. I was able to keep the volume at a moderate, very comfortable level and still feel like I was “in” the music while drumming. (The hearing-protection function of the phones was also great for just practicing on the drums without any music.)



DrumPhones are shipped with a 10' stereo extension cord, a 1/4" adapter, and a 1/8" mono adapter. The mono adapter lets you plug the *DrumPhones* into most electronic metronomes to get a “click track” that can be heard in both ears. I tried this with a Seiko unit and could hear the click quite clearly over the drums.

Some people might feel that the *DrumPhones* fit unusually tightly on their head (as compared to normal stereo earphones). This is due to the stiff plastic headband, and it's actually an advantage. If the earphones weren't held tightly against the side of the head, they wouldn't be as effective in reducing incoming sound. Admittedly this firm fit might take a little getting used to, but it's what makes the headphones work so well. (After a few minutes of wearing the *DrumPhones* I found that I didn't even notice them.)

Okay, hearing protection and wearing comfort are good. What about sound quality? Well, I'll be the first one to say that these are *not* audiophile headphones. They are really just your garden-variety *Walkman*-style open earphones built into the hearing-protection ear coverings. As a result, you can expect an acceptable—if not remarkable—level of sound quality. They will distort at extremely high volume levels—but the whole idea is that you shouldn't have to *run* them at those levels. I found their fidelity more than sufficient for practice purposes. And it is the inexpensive nature of the earphones that helps keep the cost of *DrumPhones* at a refreshingly realistic figure.

And what is that figure? It's \$59.95, plus \$5 for shipping costs. As far as I'm concerned, \$65 for the ability to play comfortably with my favorite music and keep what's left of my hearing is a bargain! For more information on *DrumPhones* contact GK Music, Inc., P.O. Box 7540, Minneapolis, MN 55407, (800) 747-5545.

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