

Snapshot Product Reviews



SABINE SWM7000 SERIES Smart Spectrum Wireless System

Wireless technology has turned into a cat-and-mouse game, as once-clear frequencies become more crowded or obliterated and the FCC keeps turning over whole spectrums to non-audio uses such as cellular phones and digital broadcasting. After abandoning VHF, the 450- and 900MHz UHF bands seemed pretty safe, but with more encroachment, a number of companies have sought haven in the spacious skies of the globally accepted 2.4GHz band.

One such example is Sabine's SWM7000 Series, a true-diversity, 2.4GHz system that allows 70 units to operate within a single location. This alone would make the unit notable, but the system also includes onboard FBX Feedback Extreminator®, compressor/limiter, intelligent de-essing and Mic SuperModeling™ digital mic capsule emulation. Also, the receiver stores/recalls up to 10 presets of all parameters for each channel for quick setups or on-the-fly changes during a performance.

The front panel has a lot more than the minimal controls found on the usual receiver, but this is no typical receiver. Each receiver channel has a large LCD showing status of RF signal, transmitter battery, audio signal strength, compressor gain reduction and displays for FBX action, front panel lock, edit parameters, mute, de-essing and more. The hardwired controls (FBX setup, mic model select, de-ess cut, compression ratio/threshold/attack, RF channel select, output level and program save/load/recall) are shared; a quick tap assigns them to either channel. Operation is familiar and fast, and you always feel in control with the SMW7000.

The back panel says a lot about the SWM7000. Each channel has ¼-inch line-

and XLR mic-level outs, a threaded antenna connector (with adapters for front or rear mounting) and a DIP switch for setting configurations such as the ½ or ⅓-octave width of the FBX filters. Also standard are RS-232 and USB ports that connect to your Windows 2000/ME/XP PC via included remote-control software. Beyond offering signal strength monitoring for 70 channels, front panel lockout, transmitter naming and unlimited preset storage, the software also provides access to channel muting, lowpass and highpass filters, advanced FBX control, compressor knee and release parameters and more. Versions with an "NDR" suffix also have network ports for setting a control network by daisy-chaining up to 35 receivers (70 channels) using standard RJ-45 cables and a stereo 48kHz AES/EBU digital output (with a BNC word clock input), which is always active.

The SWM7000 is available in 1- and 2-channel models with bodypack (lavalier, headworn mic or guitar) or handheld (Audix OM3 or OM5) transmitters. The OM3 version is fine for most applications; however, most pros will opt for the industry-standard OM5. The lavalier bodypack ships with a Voice Technology VT500 lavalier, which is good for voice applications, but there are much better lavs out there to plug into the transmitter's Switchcraft TA4F input. All transmitters have charge inputs and include rechargeable NiMH batteries, which are immune to the "memory effect" of NiCad designs. Alternatively, two standard AA alkaline cells can power the unit. Battery life is long: eight

hours per charge or 14 hours on alkalines. The handheld has two mic clips: One is conventional and the other has a built-in charger port. Clever!

Overall, I was really jazzed about the SWM7000's powerful set of onboard DSP, replacing a whole rack of gear. I've been a fan of Sabine's FBX technology for a long time, and having that built into a wireless is a natural. Ten filters are available per channel and any unused for FBX can be assigned as standard parametrics—a nice touch. The compressor/limiter is serviceable. It handles level overload protection, but it won't be replacing UREIs, Summits or dbxs on any riders. But for the smaller band that doesn't pack a dedicated vocal limiter, it's a definite plus. The one-button de-esser was a breeze to use and surprisingly good. The Microphone SuperModeling function is cool, calling up a library of virtual capsules with familiar names such as SM58, ATM41a and D-3800 to flavor the vocal sound. To my ears, these didn't provide perfect emulation, but the vocalists I worked with really liked the

feature. In any case, the modeling provides an interesting palette of sounds to choose from.

The top-end 2-channel SW72-NDR receiver retails at \$1,659.99; the OM5 SW70-HD15 transmitter is \$549.99; and other systems (single-channel, bodypack and non-network) are priced less. But DSP and other features aside, what really makes the SWM7000 stand out is its audio quality, with true 20-20k Hz bandwidth (there's no low-end roll-off whatsoever), 100-plus-dB dynamic range and clear, dropout-free performance that makes it rival hardwired systems.

Sabine, 386/418-2000, www.sabine.com.

—George Petersen



COLES 4040 Studio Ribbon Microphone

British manufacturer Coles Electroacoustics has added the 4040 (\$1,541 U.S. list) to its respected line of ribbon mics. The 4040