

# The In-Ear Stick from Fischer Amps:

BY HOLLAND DAVIS

# IN EAR'S FOR THE WORKING MUSICIAN

Let's face it. When it comes right down to it, stage volume is one of the biggest challenges for churches today. There's a whole market built around meeting this specific need. But most of the products offered require a hefty investment and learning curve to integrate into an existing sound system...at least until now. At the 2016 Winter NAMM in Los Angeles, I had the joy and privilege of previewing an exciting new introduction from Fischer Amps called the In-Ear Stick. The In-Ear Stick is a small (fits in the palm of your hand), wired miniature in-ear headphone amp for studio or live application. Retailing between \$189 - \$219, this is one of the hottest, most cost-effective solutions for in-ear monitoring on the market.

For those who aren't familiar with the way I review a product, I start by looking at the product and trying to see if I can figure out how to use it without looking at the instructions. I believe a well-built product is a well thought out product with the end user in mind. It shouldn't take

a college education to use a product, especially since the majority of people using most audio equipment never went to sound engineering school. The design and functionality has to make sense, and Fischer Amps products do not disappoint.

Before I start, I have to say that I loved working with this product. It was an instant love at NAMM and a rekindled love when I tested it in a live portable setting. The first thing you'll notice about the In-Ear Stick Portable Headphone Amplifier is the simplicity and sturdiness of the design. It roughly measures around 4 1/4" long and 1 1/4" square and it's made out of aluminum, which gives it a solid yet lightweight feel. The input features a NEUTRIK combo jack that takes XLR or 1/4" cables. The output is simple with a volume knob and a 1/8" headphone jack. The belt holder is made out of stainless steel. I mounted it on my mic stand via an



iPad holder, so it's easy to adjust the volume during a performance, but you can attach it to your belt, back pocket or guitar strap.

On the side of the unit is a small button that you press as you slide the unit

open. Inside there's a switch that gives you the option of stereo or mono output for your headphones. The default is mono. The quality of the internal components is equally simple, using high-end components like BURR

BROWN OP amplifiers which are well known for ultra-low distortion and superior sound quality. The quality of the sound was strong enough to not need an additional preamp to add to the fullness that's often missing from many in-ear monitors. The max output is 2 x 100m @ 16 ohms, which in laymen's terms means it's LOUD. I was

pleasantly surprised by the amount of volume I was able to get. The unit is powered by two AAA batteries. According to the manufacturer the battery life should last 10 hours.

The obvious question is how do you use it in real life? If you have eight in-ear monitors and four monitoring channels, how does that work? With the In-Ear Stick, musicians can control their own volume but not their personal mix. They will need to rely on the Front of House or Monitor Mix position to mix their in-ear

monitors. Fischer Amps offers an in-ear Amp that can provide a mono or stereo signal to eight in-ear monitors at once. With four mixes you might consider having a mix for the background vocals, a mix for the instruments, a mix for the lead vocalist and a mix for keys or solo guitar. If you have two mixes then it's vocals and instruments. The In-Ear Amp 8 runs around \$480.00 on Amazon.com. Even if you buy two of these units and eight In-Ear Sticks for your monitoring system, you are still running under \$3000.00 for a complete in-ear monitoring system for eight that sounds amazing and is easy to set up. We run a Behringer X32 Digital Mixer for front of house which gives us 16 potential monitor mixes so all we need are eight In-Ear Sticks, which makes our total out of pocket less than \$2000.00. Here's the bottom line for me: it's easy to use, easy to set up and can integrate into any system without having to purchase a bunch of extra gear. That's punk rock - in a worshipful sort of way of course. The only drawback is

it's wired, which means you're chained to a mic stand or limited by the cable dangling at your feet. This could be an issue if you're a Pentecostal church that likes to do aerial acrobatics during worship, but for most churches this isn't an issue. Another drawback is it's heavily reliant on a sound engineer that understands the importance of getting a good monitor mix in the headphones. Since each performer isn't mixing their in-ear monitors, it does take more time during sound check. However, compared to the cost benefit this is a trade off I'm willing to make. For churches that are looking to get into an

in-ear monitoring system, this is not an entry-level system. This is the real deal. For portable churches, the Fischer In-Ear Stick offers the best in-ear monitoring solution for ease of set up, ease of storage and ease of use by untrained volunteers.

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## HOLLAND'S REPORT

EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FLEXABILITY	★★★★
STABILITY	★★★★★
PRICE	★★★★★
OVERALL VALUE	★★★★★