

Interview: Musician/Producer Pete Anderson on Guitar Production

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REVIEW

Roswell Pro Audio Aztec

A respected mic builder releases its first boutique tube microphone



REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Besides nodding to a love of ancient civilizations and geographic locations where aliens and UFO sightings may have occurred, Aztec is the first tube microphone to land in the Roswell Pro Audio universe. When I saw its release at the 2023 NAMM show, I could not wait to investigate further.

The Roswell Narrative

Roswell Pro Audio was founded by Matthew McGlynn, a respected microphone expert who oversees the online Recording Hacks microphone database (recordinghacks.com) as well as the popular DIY microphone building and modding website, Microphone-Parts (microphone-parts.com). These passions and knowledge converge in Roswell Pro Audio, which offers a growing lineup of custom microphones. Made from meticulously researched and hand-selected parts sourced from around the globe, the mics are assembled, tested and tuned in Northern California wine country.

Over the past eight years, I have had the pleasure of reviewing the petite and affordable Mini K47 (September 2015), Mini K87 (February 2020) and Mini K67x (August 2022), as well as the company's boutique-level Colares (October 2018) and Delphos II (October 2019).

Aztec

While Aztec is the first large diaphragm tube mic in the Roswell line, it is a beneficiary of sorts of the many tube mics and mods in the Microphone-Parts catalog. That said, it's best to think of Aztec as the boutique next-level cousin.

Aztec is visually and sonically in the classic Telefunken ELA M 251 / AKG C12 camp, and yet like every Roswell model, it's a modern inspiration and in no way a clone.

Outside

Aztec comes in a C12-inspired 9.25" (L) x 1.75" (D) brass body available in satin black or vintage cream, both with

a chrome ELA M-style head basket. Two switches on the body engage a high-pass filter (-3dB @ 140 Hz) and a -10dB pad. A 7-pin (XLR7M) XLR connector is on the bottom of the mic.

Inside

Inside the mic, you will find a section of top-shelf audio components laid out impeccably on the internal circuit board. This includes what Roswell calls premium, rare and "unobtainium" low-noise components. The company also makes its own Roswell-branded electrolytic capacitors. The capsule is an edge-terminated, dual-diaphragm RK-251 capsule. This is coupled with a 6072/12AY7 tube configured as a single triode, and a custom output transformer.

Patterns and Power

Aztec is a 9-pattern mic (Omni through Cardioid to Fig. 8) selected with a 9-position stepped switch on an external power supply. The 2.38" (H) x 6.75" (D) x 5.58" (W) power supply is solid and well-built with a very modern look (the color will match the selected mic finish). Its high-quality Swiss-made pattern switch is definitely worth drawing attention to.

Package

Aztec comes in a large aluminum briefcase with the power supply, a vinyl mic pouch, a Gotham GAC-7 XLR tube microphone cable and an AudioQuest IEC power cord—one of the most robust IEC cables I have ever seen.

The kit also includes a hefty black vintage-style shock mount with thick thumb screws to clamp the mic in place versus the more common pop-and-lock mic clip style.

Aztec Tones

While Aztec is part of the 251/C12 school, it has its own flavor. There is no published frequency plot, but to my ears and compared to similarly flavored mics, Aztec is largely neutral in the lows and

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Frequency Range: | 20 Hz–20 kHz |
| Sensitivity: | 14 mV/Pa |
| Impedance: | 200 Ω |
| S/N Ratio: | 80 dBA |
| Equivalent noise: | 14 dBA |

low midrange with no obvious pushed or sculpted frequencies below 3 kHz. The upper midrange and highs are bold and forward from what I would guess is 3–4 kHz to 18–20 kHz, which gives the mic an open clarity and presence in line with its inspiration.

Overall, Aztec exhibits an outstanding balance of fullness and detail. I keep returning to the word richness. The high-end is clear as a bell yet tempered with just the right amount of smoothness to keep harsh bite and sibilance at bay.

Patterns and Proximity

Moving through its patterns, the mic expectedly opens up and thins out to a wide omni capture and is at its most thick and bold in Fig.-8 mode. I like that moving through patterns exhibits zero pops or thumps, yet Roswell does recommend giving the mic about ten seconds to stabilize when a new pattern is selected.

Its off-axis rejection maintains its tonal balance well, presenting as a smooth, quick roll-off rather than a fast cut. The proximity effect is full-bodied right up on the mic and rolls off at distances of 2–3"

and beyond. Nicely Aztec maintains its sonic signature and balance both up close and at a distance.

In Use

By design, this is one of those "use it on darn near any source" microphones in the classic workhorse school. It excels on vocals where it can be full and intimate up close or smooth and clear at 3–6" away.

I only had one, but I found Aztec to be a great front kit mic or mono overhead (I would guess a pair is fantastic on drum overheads). It's also a nice acoustic guitar, mandolin, violin and ukelele mic that sounds great while taking in the instrument from 2–3' away rather than the usual 12th fret position. It also works well a foot or more back on a bass cabinet, as well as on a guitar cabinet for clean jazz and blues tones.

The only sources where Aztec would not be my first choice would be loud screaming guitar cabinet, kick drum or perhaps an aggressive metal singer—even padded these can overpower the mic. To be fair, these are all sources where I don't usually reach for a C12 flavored mic.

Impressed

It can sound a tad anti-climactic, saying a mic sounds good on anything, but Aztec is one such mic and then some. The kicker is this, just as the Mini K models are less than \$500 mics that compete with mics twice their price, so it is here. I tried Aztec alongside some mics that I had on hand ranging from \$5,000–\$7,000, and it absolutely held its own in sonics and depth—and I do not say that lightly.

Wrap Up

The Roswell Pro Audio Aztec is an impressive mic that proudly shows off the company's mic-building paradigm of purposely selected components and no compromise design. Here is the sobering part, currently the mic has an introductory price of \$2,499, but it is slated to go up to \$3,299. The introductory units might already be gone by the time you read this, so if you are after a great modern take on one of the most coveted classic mic flavors, you might not want to delay. ➔

Price: \$3,299 (\$2,499 introductory price)
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