

# Heads Up!

## Extreme Isolation Headphones

By Dan Richards

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I review a lot of gear, and this new Swiss-made product stands out from the pack as one that delivers a no-compromise solution to a common problem in audio work: Keeping loud external sound out of the headphones and keeping headphone sound from bleeding to mics.

I received a pair of EX-29 Extreme Isolation Headphones for review from Direct Sound. At \$169, and *worth it* these babies mean serious business. As of this writing, they are currently on sale for \$139. I've had them on in the studio while cutting drum tracks, and also used

them to double-check panning and imagery on a mix. I was able to put these phones on and not hear the main monitor mix in the room.[an error occurred while processing this directive]The EX-29 phones are painstakingly well thought-out. For travel, they fold up neatly and into a surprisingly small package. For easy and quick identification of L and R, the inside of the right phone is red, while the inside of the left phone is black.

The sound is solid, tight, old school. Nothing hyped just sonically pleasurable and smooth. I don't care for the overly-hyped high-end on a lot of Sony headphones, and I've been using AKG K141's almost exclusively for years. EIH may very well become another main pair in my audio work. I find that just listening to MP3s on my computer, I'm re-exploring new dimensions in the music. The imagery and spatial depth are superb. Listening to Coldplay's track "Parachute" with EIH exposes subtle nuances of the creaking piano bench and pedals.

Listening to CDs and MP3s through them for hours at a stretch causes no ear fatigue and, surprisingly, little to no discomfort. Extreme Isolation Headphones are quite comfortable considering the extreme design needed to deliver an impressive reduction of 29db. With a low impedance of 32 ohms, almost any source will provide enough power to drive these phones adequately.

An interesting experiment is to listen at a good level, and then take them off and push the two phone pads together. What is heard ♦ even with the phones less than six inches away ♦ is nothing. Zilch.

One very important advantage of the excellent isolation is that lower decibel monitoring levels can achieve the same effective hearing levels commonly used with conventional headphones. What that means in plain language is that you can use EIH with much less risk of hearing damage.

This type of headphone is perfect for use in the field for live sound, DJs and A/V production work and location film work, and while I never recommend headphones for music mixing, I would recommend these for use while cleaning up tracks and editing audio. Computer-based audio editing systems are so popular but many people have them in less than perfectly controlled rooms. With EIH, gone are distracting background traffic noises, computer fan noise and general ambient noise in the atmosphere that detracts from critical listening. EIH also offers a great alternative for project studio owners who may have less-than-stellar monitoring conditions for tracking.

The cord is nice and light and more pliable than on many other makes. For as much thought as Direct Sound obviously put into these phones, I initially didn't like the fact that a cord runs down from each phone joining together in a Y-shape. But, on further use, and wearing them with the cord behind the head as suggested by Direct Sound, I find the Y cord to be better balanced ♦ and miraculously, the cord stays completely clear of arm movements while playing an instrument or working at a computer.

I highly recommend Extreme Isolation Headphones. If you are a professional or serious hobbyist who works with audio on any level, you need to add these headphones to your toolbox and explore the myriad of applications EIH will allow over conventional headphones.

**Dan Richards** is a Contributing Editor for [Digital Pro Sound](#) and is currently producing [The Listening Sessions](#).


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