Jim Ebdon uses Austrian Audio Microphones on Tour



Veteran studio and live sound engineer Jim Ebdon may be fast approaching four decades in the industry but he is by no means set in his ways, constantly on the lookout for the latest and greatest audio tools to help his artists shine. Relatively recent additions to his touring toolkit are a couple of condenser microphone models from Austrian Audio, including the OC818 and the CC8, which Ebdon has been using

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to capture drummer Jonathan “Ginger” Hamilton on Sam Smith’s ongoing Gloria the Tour.

Ebdon, whose credits include mixing front-of-house on tours with Justin Bieber, The Weeknd, Aerosmith, Maroon 5, Matchbox Twenty and many, many others, has had a long relationship with the team behind Austrian Audio, which was set up in 2017 by about two dozen former employees of another Vienna-based microphone manufacturer. It was Austrian Audio’s Walter Rührig who first put the OC818 large-diaphragm condenser mic into Ebdon’s hands. “Walter got me onboard really early with the 818s,” he says. “I'm so glad to see people using them on tours, in studios and on TV shows. I’ve been using them since day one so it's nice to have been part of spreading the word.”

On Sam Smith’s current tour, which launched in early 2023, Ebdon has been miking Hamilton’s drumkit with a pair of OC818s positioned as overheads. “We tried different overheads in different spots, but the 818s just kill it,” he reports. “They're really open and natural sounding and don't need a lot of EQ.” In addition, he captures Hamilton’s hi-hat and the ride cymbal using Austrian Audio’s CC8 cardioid true condenser microphones.

The overhead OC818s, which feature switchable polar patterns, are capturing more than the cymbals, he stresses. “They're picking up the tom toms and the snare drum as well. It's a whole picture of the drums. The mid-range in these microphones is so nice.” The fact that Hamilton is such a good musician also helps with the drum sound, Ebdon observes. “He's the most consistent drummer I've ever worked with. I think I've only ever heard him miss a hit on a drum once. He's also very consistent with his drum tuning.”

To minimize phase cancellation the two overhead mics ideally need to be positioned equidistant from the snare drum. Some engineers measure the respective distances between the snare and the two mics. “But I just use my ears,” says Ebdon, who typically listens at front-of-house and works with an assistant on the stage to position the drum overheads in exactly the right spots: “With any microphone, you have to find the right spot. Often, I’ll switch the overheads out of phase and that seems to line everything up nicely. The whole drum sound becomes fatter.”

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Picture: Dan Norris

The Austrian Audio mics rarely need corrective equalization, Ebdon reports, but he will often sweeten the sound. “I may add some air on the high end. And usually, with the overheads, I roll off some bass, just so I'm not getting any of that unnecessarily low rumble from the stage or the drums. Then I find that mid frequency where the snare tends to clatter in the overheads. I want the low end of the snare, but I don't need that cluttery top part of it, so I'll EQ that that out. And really, that's it,” he says. He takes a similar approach to the CC8 condensers on the hi-hat and ride cymbal, he says, boosting the appropriate high frequencies to get a little more air. “Then I roll off some low end and find that honky mid-range again, and get rid of that, so that the cymbal sound of the hi-hat is very hi-fi and not at all clattery.”

The decision to adopt the Austrian Audio mics was unanimous, he says. “I work very closely with Sam's monitor engineer, Saul Skoutarides, an Australian fellow. Saul is very meticulous in the way he works, so he loves these microphones, too.” The two mixers and the tour production team also appreciated that the manufacturer went the extra mile where the finish was concerned. When the Sam Smith tour first set off last year the stage design was gold, Ebdon says. “Austrian Audio very kindly made some gold-plated OC818 and CC8 condensers for us. Now, the stage sets have turned black, and the drum set now is black. Fortunately, they make black microphones.”

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The Austrian Audio mics have stood up to the rigors of the road. “They've been dropped. They've been misused. But, touch wood, they've been amazing,” he says. Then there was that one time when a band member borrowed one of the mics, without asking, for a backstage recording session. “He dropped it and never said anything. But it still worked fine,” Ebdon is relieved to report.

Gloria the Tour, which began in June, has visited Europe, the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Asia and Oceania. At the end of June, the tour starts another leg in Europe, taking in two dozen festival dates, from Pinkpop through Pukkelpop to Lollapallooza Berlin, across the continent.

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