

MrSpeakers VOCE



MrSpeakers is led by its *headmaster* Dan Clark, a keen-eared headphone enthusiast and an engineer's engineer. The company takes its name from an earlier phase in Clark's career where he served as an accomplished loudspeaker design specialist for hire. More recently, his efforts have centered on creating a growing range of full-size headphones, all of which have had planar magnetic designs—until now. For the past three years, Clark methodically has been developing a new flagship electrostatic headphone called the VOCE, priced at \$2999.

Why an electrostatic? The answer is that Clark always loved the clarity and resolution of electrostatics, but felt they needed “a more extended bottom end with a more relaxed high-end delivery.” To this end, the VOCE's electrostatic driver diaphragms are larger than most (88mm

HIGH END: \$2000-\$3999

in diameter), yet also thinner (2.4 microns thick) and lower in mass. Completing the picture are what MrSpeakers terms “ultra-thin metal stators for superior sound”. The result is a driver offering exceptional transient agility, resolution, and nuance, with sufficient area to move serious amounts of air.

The VOCE features a Nitinol memory metal headband frame beneath which is suspended an adjustable leather headband strap. The frame also carries a pair of elegant matte silver ear cup yokes to which open-back ear cups are mounted. The ear cups’ rear sides are protected by open-design spider web-like grills while their lower edges provide connectors for the VOCE’s included sets of custom-made signal/bias voltage cables. The ear cups are fitted with thick, bevelled, leather-clad ear pads. MrSpeakers provides three sets of user-installable voicing filters that can be fitted within the pads’ ear openings. Capping things off is a walnut presentation case doubling as a headphone stand, complete with hinged acrylic doors featuring an opening through which signal cables can be routed.

From the moment I connected the VOCE to my electrostatic energizer (that is *stat-speak* for an electrostatic headphone amplifier), I was struck by the sheer transparency and lucidity of its sound and by the incredible amount of musical information it was able to extract from favourite recordings. Even more impressive was the manner in which it managed to combine breath-taking clarity with exemplary smoothness and control. Some electrostatic headphones exhibit heightened levels of treble *sheen*, overshoot, or glare, but the VOCE exhibited none of these typical electrostatic flaws.

On a high-res recording of Keith Jarrett’s *Koln Concerts* [ECM, DSD64], the VOCE captured the lilting yet articulate voice of Jarrett’s piano with natural clarity—right down to the vestigial sounds of the piano’s action, hammers on strings, pedals being applied or released, and even the creak of Jarrett’s piano stool. The effect was much like hearing a master pianist perform from just a few feet away and with no hi-fi artefacts to mar the sound in any way!

Unlike many electrostats, the VOCE also can deliver rock-solid bass and potent dynamics on demand, as the music warrants. For example, on a high-res recording of “You Love the Thunder” from Jackson Browne’s *Running On Empty* [Asylum, 24/192], the VOCE made child’s play of presenting the deep, potent punch of Leland Sklar’s electric bass and the soulful wail of Danny Kortchmar’s electric guitar, not to mention Russ Kunkel’s exuberant drumming. In short, the VOCE can rock with the best of them and with layers of nuance one might not have thought possible. Similarly, on Mark O’Connor’s *Fanfare for the Volunteer* [Sony, 16/44.1], the VOCE effortlessly transitioned from producing the sound of an orchestra at full song to the softer, subtler sound of O’Connor’s folk-inflected violin solos, always with composure intact.

The question of whether to use the supplied tuning filters is a personal one, so experimentation is encouraged. (I preferred the VOCE with the subtlest of the included filters, but you might choose differently.) Either way, the VOCE stands as one of the finest electrostatic headphones ever created and one that provides stiff competition for Stax’s legendary SR-009. **Chris Martens**

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Open back electrostatic headphone

Driver complement: One 88mm dust shielded, full-range electrostatic driver with a 2.4 micron-thick diaphragm

Frequency response: Bass response extends to 10Hz -3dB; upper frequency limit not specified

Sensitivity: Not specified

Impedance: Not specified

Bias voltage: Requires 580V “Pro-bias”, compatible with electrostatic headphone amplifiers or energizers that support “Stax-Pro” bias voltages

Accessories: Detachable custom made signal/bias cable featuring a non-microphonic jacket, low capacitance silver-plated copper conductors, and a proprietary Teflon amplifier plug with a machined aluminum housing and gold-plated copper connection pins, plus machined aluminum headphone connectors. Other accessories include a walnut presentation case/storage unit with an internal headphone stand and hinged acrylic doors providing a front slot for signal cable feed-thru; three sets of user-installable tuning filters for subtle voicing adjustments.

Weight: <330g

Price: £2,600 UK; \$2,999 US

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

MrSpeakers Headphone Products

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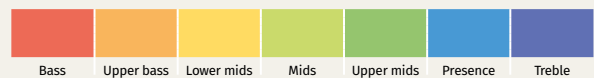
URL: www.mrspeakers.com

UK DISTRIBUTOR

Electromod

Summary

Voicing: Fundamentally neutral (although some perceive the VOCE to be slightly midrange forward).



(All ratings relative to comparably priced headphones.)

Resolution/Focus:



Soundstaging/Imaging:



Dynamics/Expression:



Value:



Pros

- Light and comfortable design with superb build quality, fit, and finish.
- Exceptionally low distortion and coloration.
- Extremely high-resolution, but without trace elements of brightness or glare.
- Great dynamics (including bass dynamics).

Cons

- As revealing as the day is long, the VOCE can expose shortcomings in ancillary gear or recordings.