

Shure SE425



By Tim Gideon August 30, 2010 9:51AM ESTAugust 30, 2010

Editors' Rating: ●●●●○ EXCELLENT

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PROS

High quality, flat-response audio performance. Detachable cable can be replaced, rather than buying a new pair of earphones.

CONS

Fit can be tricky to secure at first. Not for bass lovers.

BOTTOM LINE

The near-flat response of the Shure SE425 will appeal to audiophiles looking for a hint of added low-end, but booming bass addicts should look elsewhere.

For most people, \$300 for earphones seems absurd, but for audiophiles, something in this price range can be considered slightly beyond entry level. Mind you, that's entry level for someone aspiring to one day own \$1,350 custom-molded earphones, but Shure's new SE425 ought to placate the audiophile on a budget. At \$349 (list), the earphones offer a flatter response than most pairs in this range, yet provide more bass response than the truly flat Etymotic ER-4S (\$299 direct,). A detachable cable extends the value here, since nine times out of ten the cable snaps or malfunctions long before the earphone's drivers die. Booming bass addicts should look elsewhere, but the SE425 is a winner for the burgeoning audiophile.

Design

The SE425 is easily the best-looking earphone pair Shure has ever offered. An easy, if inconsequential, criticism of past Shure models is that they were, well, visually boring. It's amazing what a little translucent plastic or shine does. The SE425's bulky earpieces come in two styles—metallic or clear—and both serve to dress up the formerly drab SE series. The aforementioned detachable black cable is 64 inches long, and relatively sturdy. There's "wireform" built in at the connection to the earpiece so that you can firmly shape the cable over and around the back of your ear, which provides a more secure fit. Making the cable stay in place the first few times can be a challenge, but after a couple of days of wearing the SE425, I was able to put them in quickly and maintain a secure seal.



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The included nine eartip pairs come in enough sizes, shapes (from flanges to rounded tips), and materials (from silicone to sponge foam to hybrids) to fit just about any ear out there. The pair the earphones were outfitted with attached fit my ears (and our testing system's artificial ear) in a comfortable and secure way. Fit, particularly in more expensive models, is of the utmost importance, and it's clear that Shure sought to improve the fit of its earphones by including the wireform and the abundant eartip options. A black, zip-shut oval protective case ships with the SE425, as well as an earwax-cleaning tool to keep the earpieces clean and free of obstructions and a ¼-inch adapter for larger headphone jacks.

Performance

Our HEAD Acoustics frequency response tests documented the reserved, nearly flat response of the Shure SE425 quite well. Just look at [the graph](#) comparing it to the similarly-priced [Monster Turbine Pro](#) (\$299.95, ●●●●○), an earphone pair that is anything but flat. The difference in bass response (evident in the left-hand portion of the graph), is at times as much as 13dB, a staggering amount. Simply put, the Turbine Pro is for bass fiends and the SE425 is for someone who wants to avoid that kind of exaggeration entirely. A comparison with the very flat Etymotic ER-4S, though, shows that Shure did not forsake bass response

(evident in the left-hand portion of the graph), is at times as much as 13dB, a staggering amount. Simply put, the Turbine Pro is for bass fiends and the SE425 is for someone who wants to avoid that kind of exaggeration entirely. A comparison with the very flat Etymotic ER-4S, though, shows that Shure did not forsake bass response altogether—it consistently offers about 4-5dB more bass response until the two earphones start to behave similarly around 1.5kHz and higher. There's a bit of a spike around 7kHz for the SE425, followed by a fairly steep drop off. Just as Shure isn't adding much to the low frequencies here, the high frequencies, except for that spike, seem almost untouched, if not under-represented.

The end result is a pair of earphones that can handle thumping bass, like the throbbing electronic drum beat of The Knife's "Silent Shout," without distorting or sounding weak and thin. The lack of push in the higher frequencies sometimes leaves me wishing the pair were a tad brighter. Compared with the Etymotic ER-4S, the SE425 has more low-end presence but less overall crispness—something that can be missed in a gravelly singer's delivery or in the bows of an orchestra.

Not that I suspect anyone would, but don't spend your \$350 lightly. You should always know your preferences as a listener before committing to any earphone (or headphone) pair in this price range. The three models mentioned in this review differ quite drastically in several ways—from fit to, most importantly, audio performance. Don't deny yourself big bass if that's what you truly want, but for audiophiles in search of more flat-response earphones, the SE425 is a fantastic option that doesn't completely forsake low-end. For \$50 less, however, the Etymotic ER-4S offers a response that feels so clinically precise, it would be irresponsible not to sing its praises here as well.

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