

East meets West, and the winner is . . . you

CharterOak Acoustics E700 Multi Pattern Condenser Microphone

By [Roy Stein](#), [Tony Gross](#) | November 2006

This past decade has witnessed an invasion of mics that have been tough on tradition. Chinese-manufactured, large-diaphragm studio condenser mics that copy both the circuitry and the external housing of their Western counterparts have found their way into many recording studios, as they're cheap in comparison to their erudite ancestors. However, in many cases the similarities end at "sharp looks," and with so many different brands flooding the market, one wonders which of these mics is w to buy . . . if any.

Perhaps we should take some advice from Aristotle and Lao-Tzu, and embrace the middle ground — which is where the CharterOak E700 lies. This robust, dual-diaphragm FET condenser mic shares some characteristics with the import competition to keep costs reasonable. Sure, some of its basic components, including circuit cards, metal work, and the fl case, are manufactured at facilities that work with other rebranders of microphones, but that's where the cloning around stops and individual design and quality control steps in.

Starting with a piece shipped in from China in "rough assembled" form, the mic is then biopsied and reassembled by han with Xicon, Mial, and WEMA polystyrene and polypropylene capacitors to optimize the audio path. Before shipping, each mic goes through a final testing phase before it is stamped with its coup de grâce: a lifetime warranty.

CONSTRUCTION

We were informed that if we took the mic apart we wouldn't find any cheap hookup wire, and the wiring would be neatly i place. Way too late for that; within hours of its arrival we had that sucker pithed like kids on a frog in Biology 101. The sp circuit board design was nesting on a rugged but cleanly machined platform, and only Teflon-coated wire is used to mak the connections between the capsule and head amplifier to ensure maximum noise rejection and to faithfully reproduce detailed highs.

When it comes to design and quality control, CharterOak appears to be demanding. For example, originally the E700 employed a Chinese output transformer. However, only 11 out of 40 of those transformers passed the company's quality control standards. Starting at s/n 0012, it was replaced with an American component. Also, beginning with s/n 0040 CharterOak has replaced the 3-position pad and 3-position pickup pattern switch with a heavy-duty 3-position toggle, ratl than the earlier model's slide switch. Alright, it's all sounding sweet . . . in theory.

APPLYING THE E700

An organic-sounding rock band was recording in Studio A doing the standby drill: vocals, drums, bass, guitar. The clock' tickin' off billable hours, so it's a trial by fire for the E700. Typically on a kick drum we remove the front head and use eith an EV RE-20 or an AKG D112 on the inside of the shell placed slightly off axis about 8" from the beater, as well as a Soundelux E47 about 8–10" outside the shell (all through API 3124 preamps), as this usually captures spectacular result So we decided to throw the E700 solo about 4" outside the front of the kick, through the API 3124 — it was so good, we well enough alone. Recording the kick became a single mic/mic pre chain, which freed some prime gear for other sonic territory.

Up next, acoustic guitar: a Gibson Hummingbird, known for its full-bodied, warm, velvety tone. But in a rock band compe for prime sonic real estate, it can easily get lost in the mix or, at higher levels, muddy up the track. We set up the Sounde E47 on the low end of the guitar, off axis, along with a Røde K2 on the top end to capture the 12th fret nuances, which sounded great. Then we replaced the K2 with the E700, and had the band members take a blind test. They all chose the E700.

To cut vocals, we set up a Soundelux Elux 251 and the CharterOak E700. We ended up going with the Elux for the main

track, but were not at all disappointed by how the E700 held up (a good thing, given the price difference between the two). The E700 was characterized by detailed highs, without being brittle, and an open bottom end. And by adding just a touch of compression on playback, the vocals sat nicely in the mix.

CONCLUSIONS

“East is East and West is West.” Not in 2006. By combining U.S. quality control and the selective integration of high-end components with low cost manufacturing available in China, CharterOak offers an excellent buy for the buck. The E700 would be a welcome addition to any rocking mic cabinet, or a smart choice as a first upper-level mic.

Product type: Dual-diaphragm FET condenser mic.

Target market: Higher-end studio and mid-level applications with cost restrictions in mind.

Strengths: Detailed highs along with clean, open low end. Excellent shock mount and flight case. Lifetime warranty.

Limitations: Hefty, so be careful with mic stands.

Price: \$1,199 list

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