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Stanton DJ Pro 3000

Pro DJs need pro tools. If you've already invested in music, speakers, amps, decks, and a mixer, it doesn't make any sense to skimp on headphones. After all, as a DJ, your ears are vital to your career. If you can't hear, you can't work.

That's why I've always wondered about DJs who show up for gigs with consumer-oriented headphones. Typically, these products don't block out much ambient sound, they distort even at modest volumes, and they're uncomfortable. The only reason DJs buy such headphones is because they seem inexpensive—until you have to replace them every month, or they totally fail during your guest set at the biggest dance club in town.

Don't risk your hearing and your reputation by relying on cheap—as opposed to affordable—products. Quality headphones aren't expensive, and even audiophile-quality models are well within the reach of most professionals. In fact, DJs today have a greater selection of viable and desirable ear gear than ever before. There's simply no excuse for using ugly, uncomfortable, no-low-end-havin' headphones anymore.

The new breed of high-end, purpose-built headphones is perhaps best exemplified by the DJ Pro 3000 from Hollywood, Fla.-based Stanton Magnetics (stantondj.com). Although they carry a list price of \$199, I've found them online for around \$130. Clearly, you don't have to be a jet-setting superstar to afford these 'phones.

As their name suggests, the DJ Pro 3000 headphones are designed specifically for DJ use. These are professional tools, not "audio-tronic" toys. And, despite their rugged construction, they're definitely not re-badged studio cans, either. Although they'd be fine for recording or remixing, these headphones are really made for cueing, monitoring, and beat-matching the next track of your prime-time, house-rockin' set.

I've been testing these Stantons for months now, and during that time I've grown to love them. I liked the look of the headphones as soon as I opened the shipping box, but pretty is as pretty does. I wasn't ready to fully embrace them just because of the aesthetically-pleasing design, the precise fit of the parts, or the smooth, silver finish. I needed more.

Would these headphones be faithful to me, night after night? Would they protect me, tell me the truth, and caress my neck just right? Or would they go to pieces and give me the silent treatment if things got rough? There was only one way to find out: I threw them in my DJ bag—along with dozens of flyers, a package of foam earplugs, assorted CDs, two RCA cables, a cartridge case, a record brush, a 4-ounce container of vinyl cleaning solution, and a family-size bottle of Excedrin Migraine caplets—and hit the road.

The Stantons quickly proved to be everything I've ever wanted in a pair of headphones. Acoustically, they offer premium performance. The 50mm Neodymium drivers offer a full 16 Hz - 22 kHz frequency response, without the artificial bass boost favored by certain competing

products. While it's a matter of individual taste, I much prefer a more natural sound, like that of the DJ Pro 3000 headphones, for long-term monitoring. I find that accurate audio reproduction greatly reduces ear fatigue, especially when spinning records into the early morning hours.

The DJ Pro 3000 headphones are rated for 3000 mW of power, which means they can be driven hard, all night long, without fuzzing out. The lack of distortion, even at high sound pressure levels, can be misleading, however; so be careful with your mixer's headphone volume knob. Your ears will give out long before these 'phones do.

Speaking of potential hearing damage, these Stantons do a decent job of attenuating ambient sound levels, even in the noisiest booths. When spinning in clubs, I only bring up my monitors when I'm mixing in the next track, but some venues are just plain loud, even when you're not standing in the middle of the dancefloor. For those situations, it's a real blessing to have headphones that protect your ears.

Mobile gigs, of course, are usually quite different. I rarely go to the trouble of setting up a dedicated amplifier and speaker for a "booth" mix, so all of my cueing is done via headphones. Although I try to place my main speakers where they'll deliver the best sound, sometimes I have to compromise. I often end up in a corner, with speakers on either side of me. The DJ Pro 3000 headphones are ideal for such scenarios, where you're continuously subjected to relatively loud music.

While I was testing these headphones, I had an opportunity to spin the opening set of a local indie-rock festival. When I arrived at the huge outdoor stage, the sound reinforcement company was just getting everything powered up, so I quickly adjusted the turntables, plugged in my Stantons, set the levels, and started a record so whoever was behind the big console at the "front-of-house" mixing position could get a signal.

Within seconds, the engineer had the track up on the main system, and the entire stage was vibrating from the booming bass cabinets stacked on both sides of the platform. As I started to arrange my vinyl, I noticed that there was no sound at all coming from either the floor monitors or the side fill speakers. I tried to explain the situation to the harried stage manager, but to no avail. Fortunately, I was able to comfortably mix my entire set without monitors, using just the DJ Pro 3000 headphones, despite the difficult sonic circumstances. The Stantons were able to block out enough of the noise so I could beatmatch at a reasonable volume.

Best of all, the DJ Pro 3000 headphones never let me down. I could always rely on them to get me through any gig, and they seem as rugged as anything else on the market. I really liked the detachable cord (which will make any future replacement a snap) and its right-angle 3/4-inch plug. The vast majority of mixers I use have top-mounted headphone jacks, and the Stanton cable keeps cable strain to a minimum.

I should also mention that these headphones have a few more special features which some of you may really appreciate. Most noticeably, the earcups are equipped with small (but bright) blue LEDs which flash to the beat of the music. I'm sure some people will love this effect, but I'm an

old-fashioned guy, so I switched them off. Up-and-coming DJs will probably appreciate the extra attention, though, so follow your bliss.

The other worthy features are the built-in passive low- and high-pass filters. If you want or need to cut out either end of the frequency spectrum, a simple switch on the left earcup will take care of it. Personally, I didn't use this option much, but it's there if you want it. I can imagine conditions where it'd be nice to have such capabilities, but it just didn't come up during my testing.

Overall, the Stanton DJ Pro 3000 headphones are a solid value, even at full list price. They sound great, they're built to last, and they don't rub my ears the wrong way. I recommend them, without any reservations, to any DJ who appreciates truly professional equipment.