

# Majestic M-Ears

**Audiolab's new M-Ear in-ear headphones are something special, says Jon Myles.**



*Audiolab M-Ear 2D*

**A**udiolab is best known for its highly-regarded DACs (such as the M-DAC+) and amplifiers so the addition of a pair of in-ear monitors to its range is something of a surprise.

And they are certainly different. Audiolab has collaborated with ACS to develop its new M-Ear 2D and 4D headphones.

For those not in the know, ACS has a huge reputation in the pro audio world. Founded more than 20 years ago by musician Andy Shiach, its products are used across live music, broadcasting, motorsports and more. The company's custom-made in-ear comms and hearing protection equipment is used by a host of big names, from Little Mix to

U2 to Formula 1.

The M-Ear 2D (£429.95) is a two-way, two-driver design, with one driver handling mid/high frequencies and the other dedicated to bass. Alternatively, the M-Ear 4D (£699.95) boasts a three-way design sporting four drivers – one for high frequencies, another for midrange and two for bass.

Both M-Ear models incorporate balanced armature drivers. The main difference between these and the dynamic drivers is that these use an electronic signal to vibrate a tiny reed suspended between two magnets; this movement is transferred to an aluminium diaphragm that generates the soundwaves.

Additionally, both M-Ears feature

ACS's patent-pending Iris (Intelligent Resonance In Silicone) technology that is said to maximise the musical potential of balanced armature drivers. Iris construction methods are said to allow precise acoustic tuning fusing the crisp, open detail that characterises high-performance balanced armature IEMs with a musical warmth and fluidity.

The M-Ear 4Ds also feature a ported cavity for the bass drivers - said to create a more accurate low-end response.

So, as in-ear monitors go these are clearly rather different to most other designs.

Both models come with six pairs of eartips in three different sizes to get the correct fit, as well as a high-quality 1.45m detachable cable

that is terminated with a standard five-pin connector to plug into the earphones. An in-line microphone is also included for hands-free convenience when making calls.

Construction-wise the M-Ears live up to their price-points, being sturdy and with a – thankfully – tangle-free cable. Over a long listening period both sets stood up to being pulled in and out of pockets and their basic sound quality never varied once the right eartips were selected.

### SOUND QUALITY

These are exceptionally smooth and articulate 'phones. Plugging them into a FiiO X5 MkIII player - which has excellent resolution - the first impression was of a wide soundstage with excellent dynamics.

Starting with the 2Ds, the drums and bass on New Order's 'Bizarre Love Triangle' (24/96) came over with exceptional punch but were never over-emphasised - meaning the electronic melody line floated freely above.

It was the same with St Etienne's 'She's On The Phone' where Sarah Cracknell's haunting vocals hung well above the backing track.

There's an air of presence around the instruments that means it's easy to track the individual players - so on The Pixies rendition of 'Head On' the twin guitars of Black Francis and Joey Santiago were easy to delineate.

Switching to the 4Ds there was an obvious and pronounced difference. The New Order track developed a more physical low-end and overall sound quality improved. I could clearly discern how the extra drivers make a step-up in quality. While the overall sonic signature is similar there's a greater amount of detail on offer with the 4Ds.

Compared to my reference

"There's an air of presence around the instruments that means it's easy to track the individual players"

Noble K10 in-ears the 4Ds have a slightly warmer quality but don't lose out in terms of overall quality. In fact, the 4Ds were rather better at getting the best out of some more compressed recordings with a slightly smoother sound overall.

That said, they don't leave you missing out on anything. With The Pet Shop Boys' 'West End Girls' I could clearly hear the early 1980s production - but the track still had immense verve and body to it.

Where the 4Ds really shone was with Classical music. Listening to 'Mahler's No4' through these was rather special - violins expertly represented while piano and brass

had substantial power. Switching to the gentler tones of Arvo Part's 'Tabula Rasa' (24/96) with its two violins and prepared piano I could clearly define the tone and key changes between the instruments - not something all in-ear monitors manage to capture.

There was air and space on offer and a sense that the 'phones are getting the most from the music.

Playing the same track on the 2Ds there was not the same spaciousness to the sound - but, to be honest, that's only evident when you compare the two.

### CONCLUSION

There's no end of in-ear headphones available nowadays but these new Audiolab offerings are amongst the best. The 2Ds are smooth and detailed with good bass presence - but the 4Ds take all this and add an extended low-end. There's tough competition at this price from the likes of Sennheiser, Noble and others but these Audiolabs should be auditioned.



Audiolab M-Ear 4D

#### AUDIOLAB M-EAR 2D £429.95



**OUTSTANDING** - amongst the best

#### VERDICT

Comfortable, well-constructed in-ear monitors that major on a smooth, balanced soundstage. Recommended.

#### FOR

- natural balance
- construction
- tonality

#### AGAINST

- nothing at the price

#### AUDIOLAB M-EAR 4D £699.95



**OUTSTANDING** - amongst the best

#### VERDICT

Builds on everything the 2D offers but with a larger soundstage and greater low-end presence. Dearer but definitely worth the money.

#### FOR

- exceptional bass
- superb soundstage
- presence

#### AGAINST

- tough competition

Audiolab  
+44 (0) 1480 447700  
www.audiolab.co.uk