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ESI eXtra 10 Monitoring Headphones & dSONIQ Realphones Software

Affordable headphones and software designed for an in-studio mixing experience anywhere

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT

The ESI eXtra 10 is an affordable, lightweight and well-balanced set of over-the-ear reference headphones. The eXtra 10 is designed for comfort and to offer a wide frequency response, so you'll be able to hear all the details in your mix. The eXtra 10 also comes with the custom ESI Edition dSONIQ Realphones software, which allows you to achieve a flat, linear response and simulate a control room mixing experience.

25 Years of ESI

ESI Audiotechnik was founded in 1998 in Stuttgart by musician and sound designer Claus Riethmuller. The company slogan is "German Design—Performing Worldwide," and 25 years on, ESI offers a complete lineup of audio and MIDI interfaces, speakers, monitor controllers, portable keyboards and more.

The eXtra 10

The eXtra 10 are lightweight studio monitoring headphones featuring a semi-open (ESI calls it half-closed) design. ESI has built a deceptively simple yet durable product. I would describe the overall build as pliant but not delicate.

The all-black body is complemented by the attractive bright orange aluminum earcups. The highly adjustable, flexible frame-style sliding armature should accommodate almost any head size. These headphones are fitted with heavy-duty ear pads that I found both durable and comfortable.

The eXtra 10 features 50mm diameter neodymium magnetic drivers designed to provide high-quality sonics with excellent bass response. They have a 32Ω impedance, 94dB SPL (1mW) sensitivity, 15 Hz–29 kHz frequency response and 1200mW of max power.

The headphones come with a 2.5-meter (8') 1/8" cable with a 1/4" adaptor.

Realphones ESI Edition

The eXtra 10 is bundled with an exclusive ESI-focused version of the dSONIC Realphones control room modeling software. Realphones ESI Edition runs as a standalone program or as a plugin in your DAW (VST, VST3, AU and AAX Mac OS X 10.9 or Windows 7 and newer).

The dSONIC Realphones software performs multiple tasks. First, it applies corrective processing to the headphones so that the resulting sound is neutral and linear. Second, it uses binaural virtual positioning based on HRTF (head-related transfer function) to simulate the experience of being in a studio, mixing in front of monitors. This virtual control room experience means you can mix outside your studio while still experiencing the same environment regardless of your physical location (whether in a coffee shop, your kitchen or on the road). Third, if you prefer, you can further shape the headphones' sound to your needs and taste by using low, mid and high tone controls plus presence and pressure adjustments.

*Note that the full version of dSONIC Realphones offers multiple headphone selections, while dSONIC Realphones ESI Edition is optimized specifically for use with the ESI eXtra 10.

Sound

On its own, the wide 15 Hz–29 kHz frequency response of the eXtra 10 lets you hear the details of your music clearly. I noticed a mid-scoop around 500 Hz and a bold, prominent low-end boost in the 80 Hz–150 Hz range. This could be a bit pronounced for some styles of music, but should you be mixing EDM or bass-heavy music, you are in the right place—ESI notes that that the eXtra 10 is purposely voiced this way and is similar to many other popular headphones in this price range. Of course, using the included dSONIC Realphones software presents a much flatter neutral image.

Use

In use, I found the eXtra 10 perfectly capable as a tracking headphone. Despite its semi-open back status, I experienced minimal headphone bleed into the microphones even when boosting the volume.



The dSONIQ Realphones ESI Edition works seamlessly in your DAW (remember to bypass the DAW? when printing your final mix) or on its own. I was both impressed and satisfied with the mixing I could accomplish using the software. The translation was excellent, and there are some great presets to get you started. I achieved the best results with the basic correction preset with a 75% correction mix using the mid-field monitoring system.

Lastly, I need to note the light weight and overall comfort of the eXtra 10. Under normal circumstances, I often have to take regular breaks when mixing due to the lack of long-term comfort with many headphones. This was not the case with the eXtra 10. These headphones are so lightweight and well-fitting that I could work for longer periods of time, which in turn helped me finish my mixes faster.

It's a Wrap

It's hard to argue with the eXtra 10, especially considering the low \$79.95 price tag. I think the eXtra 10 would be great recording and reference headphones for all levels of audio admirers, and thanks to the comfortable fit, they can be worn for extended tracking and mixing sessions. Of course, combined with the dSONIQ Realphones ESI Edition, they are a great companion for at-home and on-the-road mixing of music, post-production projects or your latest podcast.

I look forward to diving deeper with the eXtra 10 for my recording, mixing and listening needs. ➔

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