

# PRO AUDIO REVIEW

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If you have been involved in sound reinforcement during the last few years, you have likely experienced the effects of radio frequency interference (RFI) from BlackBerrys or cell phones. Recently, “Nextel Noise” has even reached the upper echelons of our government. In his last term, President Bush had a speech interrupted by an abrupt noise that startled attendees, Secret Service agents and even the President himself. The culprit was purportedly a Nextel phone. While that is an extreme example, I have experienced countless episodes of noise generated by executives or musicians leaving their phones next to a mic, cable or amplifier.

Audio-Technica has recently revamped their popular UniPoint contracting mics in response to user requests for greater RFI rejection, improved sonics and placement possibilities. In my opinion, it is the mark of a great manufacturer when a company responds quickly to the needs of users. Having installed hundreds of A-T mics in schools and worship houses, I was most curious to see what improvements have come to the UniPoint line.

## FEATURES

For those unfamiliar with the UniPoint line, it features an array of boundary mics, gooseneck style podium (or conference table) mics, hanging mics (for theatrical or choir applications) and a lone handheld. Within each class are a variety of choices for features like pattern, mounting style, length (goosenecks), battery or phantom power operation, and finish. Since most of these mics have been around for a while, I’ll be looking principally at the improvements that have surfaced with this most recent revision.

The folks at A-T have made some significant changes to the series with more than thirty new models. Some of the

## Audio-Technica UniPoint Series Microphones

improvements are labeled with a “Uni” prefix. First is the incorporation of UniGuard—a proprietary shielding system targeted at traditionally susceptible locations in the signal chain.

Another “Unimprovement” is the incorporation of UniSteep, an 80Hz low-cut filter to reduce plosives and rumble (like when someone drops a 6-inch stack of papers on the conference table, slams the podium with a fist, or inserts a gooseneck mic into their mouth). At 18dB per octave, the filter lives up to its “steep” moniker.

Another enhancement to the line is the addition of interchangeable elements for the gooseneck and hanging mics. Cardioid, hypercardioid and omni are now available in just seconds when a pattern issue arises. As an added feature, these elements are backwards compatible with previous generations of UniPoint mics. Speaking of goosenecks and hanging mics, A-T now has a line-cardioid model (called UniLine of course) that features a tight 90-degree pattern.

The UniPoint boundary mics now feature PivotPoint connectors. This is a rotating output connector that allows the cable to come out the back or the bottom of the mic—a sure hit for contractors who install in fancy boardrooms with pricey conference tables.

## IN USE

I was delivered a sampler of the new UniPoint mics that featured something from each category in the line. There were several gooseneck mics (U857QL, U859QL and the U857AU with an adapter mount), some boundary mics (U841A omni, U851RW, and the U891RC with local or remote switching), a hanging mic (U853A), the handheld (U873R) and some accessories. I



really liked the AT8662 table-mount shock absorber for the XLR goosenecks.

My first use of the UniPoint mics was during a committee meeting at the National Institutes of Health. If I’ve learned one thing in this line of work, it’s that scientists love to set their personal communication devices right next to the microphone on the table. I used the cardioid boundary mics (U851 and U891) on the facilitators and placed the omni (U841) at a table with some guests who would be answering a few questions. One of the cool things about the 891 is that it can be wired for switching (touch on/off, momentary on, momentary off) both locally or remotely. While this meeting didn’t call for it, this would be a wonderful feature for meeting participants to have a brief “off the record” conversation. It’s always important to find out what’s being served in the Senate cafeteria during the Armed Services Committee meetings—you just don’t want the inquiry to end up on C-SPAN.

Getting back to the scientists, this day, there was no Nextel Noise to be heard. In fact, after the meeting, I took out my pesky Cingular GSM phone and laid it right on top of the 891 and there was no noise in the system. Then, in a fit of empirical science, I wired up an old, trusty Shure boundary mic and even one of my old A-T boundary models. They both picked up the GSM noise loud and clear. No control group or placebo needed here — the new UniPoint mics totally squelched cell phone noise. Also, the new high-pass filters did a fine job of reducing table thumps and I found the boundary models — especially the cardioids — to have a nice natural sonic character.

A few weeks later, I used the U857QL for a speech by Senator John Kerry. Kerry is a tall fellow but some of the others using the podium were very short. The gooseneck on the 857 was wonderful — it has great memory and it can be moved with nary a creak. With the cardioid capsule installed, the mic had a very nice sonic character (not as bright as some A-T podium mics I've used in the past) and it did a good job of catching off axis speech without too much room

ambience.

I have used previous versions of the AT853 hanging mic for choral and theatrical applications for years. With the addition of RFI rejection, replaceable elements and a line-cardioid model for spot applications, these mics should continue to be industry standards.

I tried the handheld U837R and found it to have a pleasing sound with lots of detail. This mic would be a good complement to the other mics as it has a similar sound but can handle the rigors of loud singing. It would be well suited to soloists or praise singers where the choir and pastors were using UniPoint hanging and podium mics.

### SUMMARY

The new Audio-Technica UniPoint mics have a leg up when it comes to reducing unwanted noise from cell phones and BlackBerrys. The shielding of these mics is very impressive. Add to that, sonic improvements and configurable cable exits and you have a great product line that should please contractors everywhere.



Photo by Stuart Levy

**Senator John Kerry and an Audio-Technica UniPoint microphone**

*Andrew Roberts, a regular contributor to Pro Audio Review, is a sound reinforcement and recording engineer.*

## Review Setup

Spirit FX16, Midas Venice 320 consoles; JBL SRX, Turbosound TXD speakers; Rane, TC Electronic, BSS, Community processing.



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