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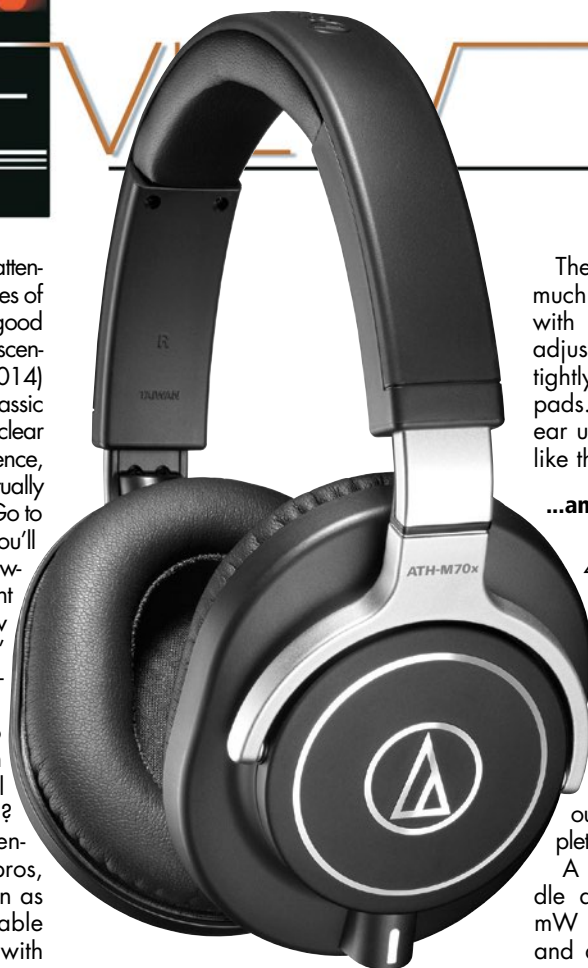




BY MIKE METLAY

Audio-Technica has garnered a lot of attention with its recent additions to the M-Series of pro audio headphones, and with very good reason. The ATH-M50 and its refined descendant the ATH-M50x (reviewed March 2014) are widely considered among the classic phones in the studio world; with their clear and honest sound, comfort, convenience, and very manageable price, they've actually become something of a viral sensation. Go to YouTube and type in "ATH-M50" and you'll get over 26,000 hits, with people reviewing and commenting on them left, right and center, generally talking about how they absolutely destroy the "fashion" brands in terms of believable and translatable sound quality.

But it's not much of a contest to beat a fashion-forward headphone in a serious test; what about the real world of studio tracking and mixing? The ATH-M50 and ATH-M50x do splendidly there as well. Among serious pros, they've garnered a bit of a reputation as a solid, unflattering, honest, reliable workhorse that gets the job done with



The headphones themselves look very much like their siblings at first glance, with a generously padded and easily adjustable headband and comfortable, tightly sealed earcups with removable pads. The earcups swivel by 90° for one-ear use and flat storage, but do not fold like those on the ATH-M50x.

#### ...and on the inside

The ATH-M70x features proprietary 45 mm large-aperture drivers with Neodymium magnets and copper-clad aluminum wire voice coils, reminiscent of the design of the other M-Series phones. Like all M-Series phones, they're closed-back, but their splendid acoustic isolation does not come at a price of heavy or uncomfortable wear. At just under 10 ounces, they're whisper-light and completely unfatiguing even after hours of use.

A few specs: the ATH-M70x can handle a maximum input power of 2000 mW at 1 kHz, with a 97 dB sensitivity and a 35 ohm impedance. Quoted fre-

## Audio-Technica ATH-M70x Headphones

### The M-Series gains a truly impressive big brother

panache. Yes, I've used the word "honest" more than once, because you never get a sense with these phones that they're hyping anything, hiding details, or making something sound like it isn't.

As if that wasn't enough of a bed of laurels to rest on, Audio-Technica then followed up with a series of less expensive M-Series phones, each with slightly different convenience features and voicing characteristics. As I mentioned in my review in May 2014, from the ATH-M40x setting a new standard for a \$99 headphone down to the ATH-M20x as an absolutely stunning value for \$49 street, there's something here for everyone.

Well, almost everyone. Even with as many fans as the ATH-M50x has, the question remained: where can we go from here? We were very impressed with what Audio-Technica could deliver at lower price points... but what if they went in the other direction to create an even higher-end listening experience?

So glad you asked, dear readers. Come along with me as I open the box and try out the new ATH-M70x!

#### The ATH-M70x on the outside...

At first glance, the various M-Series headphones can be differentiated by external features: swivelling and/or folding vs. fixed earcups, detachable vs. fixed cabling, multiple cable types, carrying pouches, removable and replaceable earpads, and so forth. Living as it does at the top of the M-Series, the ATH-M70x comes out of the box with everything you get with the ATH-M50x, and then some.

A beautiful semirigid zippered carrying case holds the headphones with a small zippered bag that contains its three removable cables. As with the ATH-M50x, you get two 3-meter cables, one straight/coiled and one straight, that share a screw-on gold-plated 1/4" TRS adaptor to go over their standard miniplugs. A third cable, intended for listening to mobile devices, is 1.2 meters long and ends in a miniplug with no adaptor. All three cables have a twist-lock fastener to hold them securely to the left earcup yet still allow quick and easy removal and replacement.

quency response is an impressive 5 Hz to 40 kHz, albeit without tolerances listed.

#### Ears on

I worked with the ATH-M70x for a period of several weeks, doing my usual listening to "torture test" tracks on everything from an iPhone to a Grace Design m902 headphone amplifier and a variety of audio interfaces at different price points. I used them for tracking, mixing, live performance (on my weekly radio show, I often do live on-air improvisations as part of my playlist), and casual listening.

When a headphone sounds "beautiful," the skeptical reviewer steps back and listens carefully for details and flaws in music he or she knows well. Sometimes the perception of beauty can come from a subtle tilt of the frequency response away from the honest and into the exciting, from an emphasis on boom and sparkle rather than what's actually in the music. But sometimes the headphone presents the music with all of its details intact, everything where it

should be, exploded outward into an almost three-dimensional soundstage... showing beauty as the sum total of what's actually in the music, exposed and open to examination. There's simply... more. That, in a nutshell, sums up the ATH-M70x.

Starting at the low end, I can say that while no tolerances are quoted for that 5 Hz bottom end, what bass is there is beautifully extended, detailed, and powerful without being overwhelming. While you don't get the chest-rattling sound pressure of a subwoofer or the all-encompassing bass boom of a \$600 "audiophile" headphone, you can really hear the deep bass, the lowest notes on a grand piano, a strong and believable fundamental on the low B string of a 5-string bass, the air and power of the kick drum. It's not just your brain filling in the fundamental based on clearly perceived upper harmonic content; it's actually there and you can work with it.

The transition from the bass into the low mids and mids is smooth and uncluttered, with each frequency range speaking clearly and without congestion or mud. From there it's up into the all-important mids, where we hear the snap of the kick drum beater, the tone of acoustic guitars, the upper harmonics of flat-picked bass, the meat of electric guitars, all presented in stark detail, almost in 3D relief against the backdrop of the music.

The treble on these phones is a revelation. While the ATH-M50x is renowned for its open and clear high end, the ATH-M70x simply soars. The extension to 40 kHz means that when you listen to high-resolution audio like 24/96 PCM or DSD, you can reach to the outer limits of human hearing and never get the sensation that the headphone is struggling to give you everything that's there. There's just air, and lots of it.

So does that mean that with all this beautiful detail, it's easy to get pulled into the beauty and perhaps miss things you should be hearing? Not in my experience. If a song was recorded or

mixed or mastered poorly, you can hear the problems, because they're presented with just as much clarity as the good parts. One of my favorite ways to test headphones is by listening to remastered CDs; some of them actually clean up the originals and improve on them, while others are simply victims of the Loudness Wars, punchier and more strident and fatiguing. The ATH-M70x points up those differences instantly.

It's always a revelation to hear some of my really old mixes from the 1980s, when I was still learning and making plenty of mistakes. A "beautiful" headphone can hide some of the nastiness, but the ATH-M70x lays everything out clearly and unavoidably.

The stereo imaging is precise and accurate, letting you make really good soundstaging decisions, and the overall effect is easy on the ears. These phones are so smooth and even that they're actually a little dangerous—the magnified harshnesses and spikiness that make other headphones fatiguing to listen to are simply not there on the ATH-M70x. You can find yourself listening louder than usual, longer than usual, and never realize you're pushing your ears too hard until hours later. What a wonderful seduction!

### Conclusions

The ATH-M50x remains one of my favorite headphones. I've come to love its workmanlike yet lovely honesty, and still consider it one of the very best values out there in a pro audio phone. But the ATH-M70x takes that listening experience and catapults it to a whole new level of exacting detail and sweetness. It's everything I have come to love in the ATH-M50x... and more. ➔

**Price:** \$419 (est. street price \$299)

**More from:** Audio-Technica, [www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)