

JERRY IBBOTSON
hangs the latest in
studio interior
treatment in
an effort to
tame the bass.



Unless you've been on Mars or out with an expedition exploring the Pacific Rim for the past few years you'll know that small project studios are, if not the new black, then at least much more common and more sophisticated than ever before. Every musical wannabe or freelancer seems to have something tucked away in their spare bedroom or basement.

Getting the right kit into your broom cupboard-cum-mastering studio is only half the story; you then have to create the right acoustic environment and properly treat your space for nasty reverb. Until recently that could easily have involved a healthy five-figure sum but now more and more products are appearing in the marketplace aimed at the home or small studio user.

Which is where MiniTraps fit in. These are membrane bass traps, built around a rectangular metal frame and made of rigid fibreglass. The manufacturer, Real Traps, claims they are six times better than foam traps at getting rid of noise below 125Hz. There are plenty of products on

REAL TRAPS MINITRAPS ACOUSTIC TREATMENT PANELS

the market than can knock out mid to high frequencies but getting rid of unwanted bass is a different ball game.

So I was a bit sceptical when I took delivery of a pair of white MiniTraps for my main project workshop. I run a company in York called Media Mill that, amongst other things, provides audio for video games. We've recently relocated to The Shambles, one of the country's oldest streets. Being in a medieval building (apparently the pavement outside used to be an open sewer) means we can't start knocking the walls around so any acoustic treatments we apply have to be more or less free standing. The room we wanted to treat is our main workshop that is used for general audio plus all our in-game development work. The room's probably best compared to a small post production set-up and it's the kind of market that MiniTraps are aimed at.

The Traps themselves are two feet by four and around three inches thick and can hang from the walls using screws and picture wire, or stand on their own using mic stands. We opted to hang them vertically from the two main corners of our main workshop, which is roughly nine feet by ten, with a low ceiling and very uneven solid brick walls (I blame the dodgy Medieval builders). After reading the simple installation instructions we set to work.

Installations

First, we measured the points for our screws to go into the walls so the Traps would hang dead centre between floor and ceiling, straddling the corner of the room. Then after a bit of drilling, plugging and screwing we threaded some picture wire through loops in the back of one Trap, again following the instructions. It was then a two-man job to lift the Trap up into the corner and hook the wire over the protruding screw heads. After gently lowering the frame into place we stood back to admire our handiwork (I really am the world's worst DIY-er, as my unfortunate and long-suffering wife will testify) before repeating the procedure for the other Trap.

Once both were in place it was immediately obvious just in normal conversation that they had dampened a significant amount of the rogue bass slap that was previously a problem in the room. The sound in the space was softer and more focussed but only a proper test would tell the whole story.

We do a lot of work with vehicle sounds in games. Last year I recorded audio of a pukka *WW2 Willy's Jeep* for a game project and this had shown up a particular problem in our old workspace. The Jeep's 1942 three litre engine throws out a very strong bass sound at around 110Hz that could easily fill our previous workshop and drown out just about every other frequency within the sample. We knew it was less of a problem in the Shambles but it was still present, so after admiring our skills with a drill and screwdriver we dragged out the sample and let it rip.

The result was very impressive indeed. Without needing to reach for any filtering we could hear the sound as it was recorded, the raspy tones of the motor

and the trademark whining of the Jeep gears. To engine heads like us it was like hearing the proper mix of a guitar and drums for the first time or the full detail in a piano. These strange white blocks hanging off the walls had managed to kick the over exuberant bass into touch without killing the sound itself.

A few days later we rigged up the room for an impromptu voice recording session (our full vocal area wasn't up and ready yet) and this gave us another chance to see what the Mini Traps could do. The voice artist was a friend and former BBC colleague of mine, Simon Stanley, who's a vicar and needed to record something for a radio station. He has, as all good clergymen do, a very deep voice and in the past we've had to pay close attention to this. But even with him perched on a chair in the workshop the sound was very natural and clear.

Conclusion

We've used the absolute minimum number of Traps (just two) in our small room but the effect they have had is amazing. Play any audio in there now and you get a sense of focus that just wasn't there before. We're audio producers rather than engineers but to our ears it's allowed us to hear an awful lot more clearly what we're doing, which was the whole point of the exercise. □

INFORMATION

Real Traps MiniTraps £280 incl. VAT;
MicroTraps £220 incl. VAT.

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Sonic provides a free planning service for all its acoustic products on provision of the customers room plan.

THE REVIEWER
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