

# M-Audio IE-20 XB Reference Earphones

Size matters

One of the most commonly voiced complaints about earbuds is that they don't deliver enough bottom end; those tiny drivers just don't have much material to work with when it comes to producing long waves. M-Audio's IE-20 XBs are the exception to the rule. These earphones pump more bass than many full-size headphones.

M-Audio went long by going big—the IE-20 XBs (the XB stands for extended bass) are easily the largest earbuds we've ever seen; they're more than twice as large as Shure's E4gs. Their bulky nature can be attributed to the fact that each piece houses two speakers: an armature driver for producing high and midrange frequencies and a dynamic driver to pump out the lows. A built-in crossover routes frequencies to the appropriate speaker, and a pair of acoustic canals keeps the sound waves separate until they reach your ear canal.

Those of us here with smaller ears were concerned that the Kong-like proportions of the XBs would lead to a match made on Skull Island, so imagine our surprise when we discovered how comfortable these earbuds are. The included fit-kit accommodates a wide range of ear sizes, and the cables loop over the tops of your ears, which keeps them out of the way and prevents the plugs from sliding out. The cables are removable, too, so should they ever be damaged, you can replace just the inexpensive cable instead of the entire earphone.

The IE-20 XBs aren't just bass monsters, they're equally adept at delivering crisp highs and well-rounded mids. While we listened to Warren



**Don't be fooled by their gargantuan proportions; M-Audio's IE-20 XBs are the most comfortable earbuds we've ever tested.**

Zevon's "Please Stay," the XBs impressed us with their ability to produce Zevon's lead vocals, Emmylou Harris's background vocals, and Gil Bernal's tenor sax all on an equal footing. They're pretty spectacular with games, too. We'd hesitate before using these earbuds as studio monitors, though, because they really do emphasize lows. Use them for mix-down work and you might end up with tracks that sound bass-shy when played back through other speakers and headphones. But if it's bass that makes you boogie, you'll revel in these M-Audio buds.

—MICHAEL BROWN

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\$250, [www.m-audio.com](http://www.m-audio.com)

