

MAY 2009

# Church Production

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## PRODUCT REVIEWS

SONY UWP Wireless System

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## AUDIO

# Sony

## UWP WIRELESS SYSTEM

reviewed by: John McJunkin

Sony introduced the original UWP Series UHF wireless microphone package in 2003, and it became popular and widely used. In 2008, Sony announced five new packages based on the original UWP Series, the UWP-V1, UWP-V2, UWP-V6, UWP-X7 and UWP-X8, touting a “much higher level of stability, mobility, robustness and operational convenience than their predecessors.” I spent time with a UWP-X7 and UWP-X8, and put those claims to the test.

The UWP Series consists of paired packages—a microphone/transmitter combination and a receiver. In the case of the UWP-V Series, the receivers are portable units intended for camcorder-oriented ENG and EFP applications, and in the case of the two mics I test-drove, the receivers are modules intended for use with Sony’s MBX6 Tuner Base Unit, which accommodates up to six tuner modules for PA-oriented applications. This is an excellent system for a church that is in the process of growth and will require greater sophistication and more mics over time. The church starts with an MBX6 and one or two UWP packages, and then as more mics become necessary and additional UWP packages are acquired, the tuner module is

plugged into the MBX6, and the solution is achieved. Alternatively, Sony’s SRP Series mixers accommodate these tuner modules and offer the additional functionality of a mixer, beyond simply hosting the tuner modules. The caveat here is that these mixers can only accommodate two modules each, and are better suited to A/V or commercial audio applications.

### HANDS-ON ANALYSIS

There are two distinct versions of the UWP-X7 and UWP-X8 packages—designated 3032 and 4244. The 3032 sub-version tunes channels 30-33, and the 4244 sub-version tunes channels 42-45. Both of the packages I evaluated were of the 3032 variety. The UWP-X7 package I assessed was comprised of a UTX-B2 bodypack transmitter with a unidirectional lavalier mic and a URX-M2 tuner module. Sony touts an “extremely robust metal chassis” as one of the outstanding features of the new UWP series, and I wholeheartedly concur. The hefty metal construction of the bodypack transmitter I test-drove feels incredibly solid—it seems to me as though this transmitter could really take a beating and survive. It operates on two standard AA batteries—nothing exotic—hence it’s very easy



company: **Sony Electronics, Inc.**

product(s): **UWP Wireless System**

phone: **(800) 833-6817**

website: **www.sony.com/ProAudio**

# AUDIO

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and inexpensive to maintain a store of replacement batteries. Atop the bodypack, you'll find the unit's ¼-wave flexible antenna, a slider switch that determines mic or line level input, and the 1/8-inch mini-jack representing the transmitter's single input. This jack is of the “screw-on” variety, preventing inadvertent disconnections by animated pastors.

The front of the bodypack features a single bi-color “AF/PEAK” LED to indicate audio level (green indicates appropriate level and red indicates peaking). Indeed, the audio gain is adjustable from 0 dB to -21 dB in 3 dB increments—and pressing the unit's “plus” button decreases level, which is an increase in attenuation, per se, but pushing the plus button to reduce gain still seems weird. In addition to the

“plus” and “minus” data input buttons, there is also a “set” button on the front panel for menu navigation and to confirm selections. There is also a backlit LCD display that shows audio level, RF status, chosen RF output level, channel, frequency, audio attenuation and accumulated use time. The power switch is found on the right side of the bodypack.

The UWP-X8 package I evaluated consisted of a UTX-H2 handheld microphone/transmitter combo and a URX-M2 tuner module. The microphone is a cardioid dynamic, with an astonishing SPL handling capacity of 151 dB SPL. It is a burnished black metal cylinder with a very substantial black metal mesh windscreen. While this microphone's handling surface isn't nearly as slippery as some other mics

with metal housings, I would still prefer to see some type of rubberized coating to maximize grip. Wireless handheld mics are nearly always hand-held, and despite the sturdiness of these Sony mics, dropping them can still ruin your day. The lower half of the microphone body unscrews to reveal the battery compartment (which accommodates two standard AA cells), the mic's controls and LCD display. This part of the mic is functionally identical to the UTX-B2 bodypack transmitter, with the same displayed parameters and operation process.

The URX-M2 tuner modules are simple metal boxes approximately 2.5 inches wide by 1 inch high by 5 inches deep with a control and display surface on one end and a multi-pin connector on the other. They slide easily into the slots of the MBX6 and facilitate the reception of signals from the UWP transmitters via the MBX6-included passive ¼-wave antennas, or alternately, via active antennas. The URX-M2 control panel is very similar to those of the transmitters, with “plus” and “minus” buttons, a “set” button, and an LCD alphanumeric display. The LCD indicates RF strength,

## PROS

- Exceptionally robust construction and materials
- Stable, solid operation
- Great quality sound

## CONS

- Lav mic could be smaller
- Handheld mic metal surface slippery
- Pushing “plus” button to reduce audio gain is weird

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**PRODUCT REVIEW: SONY UWP***« Continued from page 61.*

audio level, channel group and channel number, along with UHF frequency. The rear panel of the MBX6 Tuner Base Unit provides balanced XLR outputs for each of the six tuner bays, along with a single balanced XLR output representing the other six mixed together. There are also two BNC antenna connectors and power outputs for active antennas.


The UWP Series transmitters feature clever tone-squelch circuitry, which transmits a 32 kHz pilot tone along with the audio signal. If that pilot tone is interrupted, no audio is transmitted, which essentially eliminates noise and the popping one would expect upon powering up or down. Frequencies are manually selected. These are UHF phase-locked loop transmitters, with carrier frequencies separated in 125 kHz increments. Up to 188 distinct frequencies are available in the UWP models.


**CONCLUSION**

There are numerous conventions employed to make the UWP Series very easy to use, yet very solid in terms of performance. The installation and operation of the system is quite simple. The quality of the audio is excellent. Both microphones required a bit of EQ in my mix, but that's true for any mic. The handheld mic doesn't feel quite as "atomic bomb-proof" as the bodypack, but they both feel very substantial and solid.


The modular nature of the MBX6 Tuner Base Unit provides scalability for growing churches, and saves a lot of rack space that could potentially otherwise be filled with multiple receivers. I would submit that Sony has easily met the claim they make: a "much higher level of stability, mobility, robustness and operational convenience than their predecessors." All

the way around, I'm impressed with this wireless system, and I'd definitely recommend taking a look at it if you're in the market for a UHF system.


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