

Azden SGM-X

Affordable shotgun mic aims to capture only the audio you want.
By Tom Patrick McAuliffe

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Featuring a super-cardioid pattern and a mini-jack plug, the Azden SGM-X shotgun mic is made expressly for MiniDV camcorders.

● WITH TODAY'S CAMERAS, DV AND otherwise, manufacturers have made a great effort to include onboard microphones that capture better audio. But OEMs can walk the tightrope of features-versus-price only so far. To use the DV format effectively, especially when eventually transferring to film, shooters stick to medium to medium-long shots (but framed tightly). This creates a problem when there is more than a normal amount of ambient room noise and the conversation you are trying to record is more than about 12ft. away.

A shotgun mic, so named because of its shape, is designed to address just such a situation: helping a conversation pop out from background noise. These microphones "focus" their audio capture on a specific area, while excluding audio on their sides and behind them. Shotgun mics are common in motion pictures and television, and until recently only those types of productions could afford a decent shotgun mic.

Over the last 20 years Azden has made a name for itself by providing cost-effective professional and semi-professional audio-for-video products. The new SGM-X super-cardioid shotgun mic is designed exclusively for DV cameras. At under \$200, it's a small price to ensure that the conversations you record are crystal-clear.

The SGM-X is powered by a small LR-44 photo battery. In a classy move, Azden includes one. Smaller than the other shotgun mics Azden offers, the 8.34in.-long SGM-X also comes with a shoe mount for connection to your camera. I use a Sony VX1000 MiniDV camera. The mic fits on top, and the supplied mini-to-mini output cable connects to the camera's audio input.

Monitoring the audio through

headphones (you do that, don't you?) makes the difference immediately obvious. If you've ever tried to correct audio in the edit suite with various audio software packages and plug-ins, you'll certainly appreciate the advantages of a shotgun mic like the SGM-X.

I was impressed with the mic's wide frequency response. At the soft end, you can almost hear an ant cough—with very low noise from either the unit itself or the camera. And even when I recorded a live band up close with high sound-pressure levels, the mic didn't fold or distort the

BOTTOM LINE

Company: Azden

Franklin Square, N.Y.; (516) 328-7500
www.azdencorp.com

Product: SGM-X shotgun mic

Assets: Low noise; simple mini-jack I/O; windscreen for breezy conditions; shoe mount for easy attachment to camera.

Caveats: Use the windscreen only in windy situations to avoid muffling the sound.

Demographic: MiniDV shooters recording conversations in environments with ambient noise.

Price: \$299.95

sound.

The unit comes with a nice windscreen that covers virtually the entire mic. While effective in a windy situation, I would not recommend using it all the time, as it seemed to muffle the sound a bit. The maximum effective range for most camcorders' onboard mic is 10-12ft., but the problem is that *everything* is recorded. With a shotgun mic you "focus" the mic on a specific area about 15-25ft. away, and the mic does not pick up audio from the sides or behind. This allows for conversations that are much more discernible over background noises.

I really liked the mini-plug conveyance of the SGM-X and its lack of bulky adapters. But I wonder, could the mic be made to draw power from the camera itself? Sure as anything, I'll be out on a shoot and the battery will die. I also wish Azden could provide a small vinyl pouch to store the mic, but that's all minutiae. The bottom line is that the SGM-X will make your videos sound better.

If you don't have a pro-level XLR mic already, the SGM-X might be a good solution, especially when you consider the cost and bulkiness of XLR audio adapters. I like that the mic has an on/off switch so you can save on battery power. This way you can also compare it with the sound from the camera's onboard mic though your headphones.

Perhaps you're skeptical because the Azden SGM-X doesn't cost a grand? Don't be. As with many other A/V products, the advantages of computer-aided design and efficiencies in manufacturing mean lower prices. With new formats like 5.1 surround sound and DVD-Audio, great sound is more important than ever.

If you have ever been dissatisfied with the audio your MiniDV camera records, try the Azden SGM-X and you'll never shoot without it again. ●