

# 11Q

## WITH

**Kazuo Matsushita**

President, Audio-Technica



**PALM Expo Magazine's "11 Questions"** series features **Kazuo Matsushita**, President of **Audio-Technica**, as he divulges the brand's evolving role in the professional audio landscape. From its legacy of precision engineering to innovations like the R70xa open-back studio headphones, Matsushita highlights how the company continues to refine its analog-first philosophy to meet modern demands. Take a look at how Audio-Technica balances heritage with modern tech to serve studios and broadcast professionals worldwide.

### 1. YOU'VE BEEN PART OF AUDIO-TECHNICA'S LEGACY FOR DECADES. COULD YOU SHARE WHAT INSPIRED YOUR CAREER IN PRO AUDIO AND HOW YOUR JOURNEY HAS INFLUENCED THE COMPANY'S GROWTH IN THE GLOBAL MARKET?

My father, **Hideo Matsushita**, founded **Audio-Technica** in 1962 after seeing the emotional connection people had to sound when attending vinyl listening parties. This seemingly simple joy of transforming vibrations into sound inspired him to develop his own cartridges; he always started every project with a transducer, and we still use this approach today.

I believe it is this attention to transducers that has aided our growth in the pro audio market, as people are looking for clean, reliable sound. 1984 was a pivotal year for us, as we launched the **UniPoint** microphones, a series that shaped the commercial microphone market thanks to its discreet design and clear, natural audio performance. We also launched our **ATH-M7 headphones**, which would go on to inspire the acclaimed **ATH-M50x** and **M** series of professional monitoring headphones – our best-selling products

around the world.

When I took over the company in 1993, I wanted to respect the work of my father while also continuing to pursue the purest audio experience possible – a perpetual quest that continues to this day. I believe it is this constant investment in innovation that has enabled us to grow in the pro audio market. For example, the four quad rectangular diaphragms in our **AT5047 microphone** or our **immersive BP3600 immersive audio microphone**.

In addition to innovation, one of our core philosophies is "quality audio for all" and I am very proud that we employ our experience in the broadcast, studio and live sound markets to provide more people with access to quality recording equipment. For example, our series of **AT2020 microphones**, which was one of the first on the market to offer such a reliable performance for an affordable price. We use the skills and innovations we develop with professional partners to enhance the audio experience for all.

### 2. HOW DOES AUDIO-TECHNICA'S RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D) STRATEGY ENSURE THAT THESE INNOVATIONS MEET THE EVOLVING DEMANDS OF MIXING, MASTERING, AND CONTENT CREATION PROFESSIONALS?

Listening to our audience is very important. We have a trusted network of professionals across studios around the world but we also have our Creator Community, which enables us to reach out directly to people using our products for their feedback and ideas.

In addition, we are lucky enough to develop some of our products with trusted partners. In fact, some of our biggest innovations over the past five years have been in partnership with some of the world's largest broadcasters, who have worked closely with our engineers to develop solutions for their audio needs.

### 3. WITH IMMERSIVE AUDIO GAINING TRACTION, AUDIO-

#### **TECHNICA'S BP3600 IMMERSIVE AUDIO MICROPHONE SYSTEM STANDS OUT. HOW DO YOU SEE IMMERSIVE AUDIO SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL AUDIO PRODUCTION, AND WHERE DOES AUDIO-TECHNICA SEE ITSELF IN THIS SPACE?**

Immersive audio surrounds listeners with sound, delivering an unparalleled sense of presence across various fields such as movies, sports broadcasting, live events, gaming, and VR/AR. With advancements in streaming technology, this immersive experience is becoming increasingly accessible, not only in specialised settings but also in everyday content consumption.

In professional audio production, immersive audio goes beyond traditional stereo and surround sound, enabling creators to deliver more profound and engaging experiences. However, achieving accurate spatial positioning and natural sound field reproduction requires sophisticated technology from the recording stage itself.

Audio-Technica aims to establish itself as a leading provider of reliable recording solutions in this growing field. Our **BP3600 Immersive Audio Microphone System** exemplifies this commitment, offering exceptional audio quality, intuitive operation, and portability. It is designed to become a new standard for immersive content creation.

Furthermore, we remain dedicated to developing products in collaboration with industry professionals, ensuring we meet the real-world needs of creators. By delivering innovative audio solutions, Audio-Technica will continue to contribute to the evolution of immersive audio and offer listeners unparalleled sonic experiences. This commitment defines our role in shaping the future of professional audio production.

#### **4. AS AUDIO-TECHNICA CELEBRATES OVER 60 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE, HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT NEW PRODUCT LINES REFLECT THE COMPANY'S LEGACY WHILE ADAPTING TO THE DEMANDS OF THE MODERN PRO-AUDIO AND RECORDING LANDSCAPE?**

"Always analog" is our core philosophy that guides us when developing products for all markets. We always begin every project with a transducer, turning vibrations into sound, so everything starts with this pure, human endeavour. I believe this enables us to create a natural balanced sound that is necessary for professional audio and recording, as we've seen with products such as our **M-series** and 40 and 50 series microphones.

This technique is something we are constantly developing and innovating – it is our perpetual quest for pure audio. Open-back headphones provide low end extension, a better sound stage and a more accurate rendering but they are exposed to the airflow in your room, so rely heavily on the diaphragm characteristics to manage the audio experience delicately with the flow of air. As we begin every project with a transducer, our engineers are experts in diaphragm technology and worked on a new series of critical listening headphones designed for use in the studio – the **R-series**. Launched in January, the series, especially the flagship **ATH-R70xa** has already been praised by many engineers for its unrivalled accuracy in the open-back category.

We're also seeing an increased interest in analog, reel-to-reel recording, as this captures such a warm distinct sound but also aligns with the growth in the vinyl market. We've recently invested in restoring a cutting lathe at **Brewery Studios** in Berlin and we hope we can play a role in preserving analog recording for future generations.

#### **5. HAVING EXPANDED INTO DIVERSE GLOBAL MARKETS, WHAT HAVE BEEN THE KEY TAKEAWAYS THAT HELPED SHAPE AUDIO-TECHNICA'S GLOBAL STRATEGY?**

We develop the core of the Audio-Technica brand and product portfolio in Japan, as there is a great respect for the Japanese audio market and manufacturing around the world, but we believe it is also key to listen to the unique demands of each territory. We always stay true to our core beliefs of "always analog" and "audio for all" when developing new products or investing in new markets, as we believe it is important to grow in an authentic way that aligns with the history of our company. For example, we were able to respond to

the growth in demand for content creation products in our western regions by adapting the technology we had developed for professional studios and broadcasters, producing reliable, durable and affordable microphones that are now trusted by millions of creators across the world.

#### **6. WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY CONTINUES TO PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE PRO AUDIO LANDSCAPE. HOW DOES AUDIO-TECHNICA ENSURE THAT PRODUCTS LIKE THE 3000 SERIES WIRELESS IEM AND 5000 SERIES SYSTEMS STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE, ESPECIALLY WITH THE GROWING DEMAND FOR RELIABLE, INTERFERENCE-FREE WIRELESS SOLUTIONS?**

The frequency band available for pro-audio in the UHF band is narrowing due to the spread of cellular phones and other factors. We believe covering a wide bandwidth with a single product is important to providing users with stable operation in such an environment.

Our product lines, such as the **3000 Series Wireless IEM** and the **5000 Series system**, have been providing users with stable and high-quality performance for many years, allowing for as many channels as possible in a limited frequency bandwidth.

We believe that by using not only the UHF band but also other frequency bands, we can create a more interference-free environment. In the 2.4GHz band, we have a product called **System 10 PRO**, which has been very well received for its stable operation even in environments where Wi-Fi is staying. Last year, we launched its successor model named **System 20 PRO**. While maintaining the radio stability, we managed to double the maximum number of channels by reviewing frequency efficiency.

Again, the frequency range available for pro audio is limited. To address this situation, we will keep a close watch on the evolution of digital wireless communications and continue to provide innovative solutions at the optimum time to stay ahead of the market, while keeping abreast of the new wave of technology.

#### **7. AUDIO-TECHNICA'S HEADPHONES, PARTICULARLY THE M50X SERIES, ARE INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS. CAN WE EXPECT FURTHER INNOVATIONS IN THIS CATEGORY, PARTICULARLY CATERING TO IMMERSIVE AUDIO EXPERIENCES?**

We are constantly striving for innovation. At the same time, as a provider of trusted monitor headphones, we are equally focused on maintaining our current models. It is important not to "change" the products in order to offer the same sound signature that has been the reference for many users for many years. So, while we are very cautious, we are always looking for ways to provide additional comfort and innovation.

We also provide a wide range of headphones, from professional headphones to listening headphones. For example, regarding immersive audio, some of our wireless headphones support Sony's 360 Reality Audio, while our gaming headsets offer high-quality surround audio through our Immerse software in collaboration with **EmbodimentVR**.

As you mentioned in another question, since the launch of the BP3600 immersive audio microphone system, we are also working to incorporate some feedback from the market.

As for our latest initiative in monitor headphones, we have just expanded our line of **R-series** open-back headphones. The top-of-the-line **R70x** has long been highly acclaimed as a professional mixing headphone for studio use, and now we have revamped it as the **R70xa**, revamping the manufacturing process to enable even more realistic soundstage expression. We are committed to further innovation in the years to come.

#### **8. INDIA AND ASIA HAVE BEEN KEY GROWTH MARKETS FOR AUDIO-TECHNICA. HOW HAS THE INTRODUCTION OF PRODUCTS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH DISTRIBUTORS LIKE GREEN SOURCES AND OTHERS IMPACTED YOUR PRESENCE IN THESE REGIONS?**

India is a geographically challenging country, with vast distances to cover and unique work cultures in every region. It is challenging to

have a single point of distribution with one-level. Hence our partnership with **Alphatec** as the India Master Distributor for consumer and professional divisions. With their extensive two-level network of sub-distributors across the states feeding retailers, systems integrators as well as certain end users of the product, the channel growth has been phenomenal. Audio-Technica has over 1500 professional retail points, 200 consumer dealers and works with over 400 system integration partners. With this width and depth of distribution we have managed to penetrate the market with our vast range of products and reach out to the end customers to deliver the Audio-Technica promise of quality, reliability, and analog excellence.

**9. DIFFERENT REGIONS HAVE DISTINCT AUDIO NEEDS. HOW DOES AUDIO-TECHNICA ADAPT ITS OFFERINGS TO SUIT THE UNIQUE REQUIREMENTS OF THE INDIAN AND ASIAN PRO AUDIO MARKETS? ARE THERE ANY UPCOMING INITIATIVES PLANNED FOR THESE REGIONS?**

There are products which are customised to meet the regulatory requirements as well as to address specific customer needs. We launched several products in the wired and wireless microphones category as well as headphones specifically to address customer needs in India. These products have been customised to match the specifications required, but again staying close to our signature sound and performance. India is quite price sensitive as well, so many of our mass market consumer and prosumer products are positioned to be competitive, offering a very good price to performance ratio.

**10. HOW DOES AUDIO-TECHNICA STRENGTHEN ITS MARKET POSITION AND ENHANCE LOCAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES? AS LIVE SOUND MARKETS REBOUND GLOBALLY, ESPECIALLY IN INDIA, WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR HOW AUDIO-TECHNICA CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LIVE PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS?**

Analog is at the core of everything we do and by telling our authentic brand story with products that reflect our analog expertise we can connect with new audiences. For example, in India for the consumer division we have a number of listening sessions at various

record and music stores, showcasing our turntable and cartridge lines as well as our home listening headphones. On the professional side we have a number of demonstrations and experience sessions in retail stores targeting musicians and content creators as well as live, broadcast and recording professionals.

Along with our distribution channels we organise multiple roadshows and training sessions, both online and offline, targeting audio professionals at various levels as well as system integration companies. Audio-Technica Japan supports in such initiatives with equipment as well as qualified technical personnel to deliver training and information sessions.

We also work with Alphatec and we have a separate service network with over 39 centres across the country, offering premium after-sales support to customers. These centres are fully equipped to handle any possible service support scenario with spares as well as tooling to ensure a quick turnaround. It is pertinent to point out that currently the utilization of these centres for in-warranty repair is quite low, since all our products have ultra-low failure rates, highlighting our product durability and quality.

I think collaboration is key for the future of live sound. We are working closely with our broadcasting partners, such as **MotoGP**, to develop new innovative technology to capture more detail and new methods of recording audio for a more immersive experience. For example, one of the reasons we developed the BP3600 microphone to help capture the depth of audio across a MotoGP crowd, making viewers at home feel connected to the live event.

**11. WITH DECADES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE PRO AUDIO INDUSTRY, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING PROFESSIONALS AND FUTURE LEADERS WHO WANT TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL IMPACT IN THIS SPACE?**

Always listen to your audience and, where possible, include them in the product development process. Even with over 60 years of experience in the audio industry, we often receive vital feedback when products are tested by professionals in the “real world”. This feedback is essential in ensuring our products are robust enough to meet the practical demands of professionals across the world.