

Hearing is believing for Durban drummer Simon Beech



Simon Beech with his UE 11 Pro in-ear monitors.

Durban born drummer and architect, Simon Beech, has fond memories of jamming to the sounds of the 70s and 80s on his mom's Tupperware! He recently became a first-time investor in Ultimate Ears UE 11 Pro in-ear monitors, purchased from DWR Distribution.

"It's a bit of a crazy story, but when I was three years old, I went to a Peter Pan theatre production in Durban, one of those pantomimes that would fascinate any child with actors 'flying' across the stage on wires," Simon shares. "Halfway through the performance I disappeared and was eventually found looking into the orchestra pit watching the drummer. I think that's pretty much where my love for drumming started."

Simon only officially started playing the drums, and not plastic containers nor the leather footstool in the living room, at the age of 21. He had finished his national military service, became a passionate Christian, and while completing his Architectural studies, hired a drum kit which he played earnestly for up to six hours a day, to catch up. Within his second year of playing, he performed his first gig in front of a crowd. Since then, some thirty years later, he has played on numerous albums in various studios and for different producers, presented drum lessons, and while he has mostly stayed in the realm of Christian worship music and is part of a church worship team, he has also played in a few mainstream bands and is currently a member of 24 Skies which had toured internationally to countries like Belgium, Germany, Holland, and China before the days of lockdown.

"I am pretty passionate about my faith, and it has played a large part in my life," he says. "I'm no fool to think I've done it all myself and it has definitely been God's hand on my life."

Very early in his career, Simon purchased a pair of in-ear monitors that came with silicone ear inserts accompanied by a pair of earbud type headphones. "I had read up about Tinnitus and loud monitor levels," he says. "An audiologist determined a slight lack of hearing in my left ear, probably the one nearest to the snare and the high hat which gives out incredibly loud levels. When playing a rim shot on a snare drum at a loud level, it's 125 decibels each time you hit that snare, equivalent to a gunshot and which can cause damage to hearing."

Health concerns aside, Simon also wanted to hear the Click Track without having to wear bulky headphones on stage. Later, he progressed to a more hi-tech approach and purchased proper in-ear monitors which were upgraded over the years and did the job satisfactorily.

Unfortunately, Simon's in-ears were stolen. Fortunately, they were all risk insured and he received several suggestions to replace them with Ultimate Ears. "With so many people making a fuss about UE, I wanted to see what they were like. It led me to look online where I saw they were available in South Africa from DWR Distribution, it's obviously first prize to have an agent in the country should something go wrong. I made contact with Jaco Beukes at DWR Distribution, and I was cheeky when I first spoke to him, asking why I should buy through DWR instead of going direct. Jaco's knowledge and incredible service quickly answered why. I had a million questions because I always do things thoroughly, and Jaco patiently answered all of them."

Initially, Simon was keen on the UE 6 Pros, but knowing that this would be a long-term investment, and not wanting to regret his purchase a few years down the line, he decided on the UE 11 Pros. Once Simon received his new in-ears, DWR knew it would meet the expectation. "I played around with some advice from Jaco and once I had set them up correctly, I plugged them into my ears and then nearly fainted," said Simon. "I could not believe how good they sounded. The low end and clarity were honestly mind-blowing."

At a time of a pandemic, where thankfully Simon's architectural business has really carried him through, he acknowledges that the UE 11s was the more expensive choice. "But what people must understand is that if you take the cost of the in-ears, divide them by the number of years you have left playing and you divide that by the number of months in those years, you realize what you are paying per month for quality, pristine custom fitted in-ears as opposed to using a cheap option, possibly suffering hearing damage and never playing another instrument again. Suddenly the cost becomes worth it."

The in-ear mix has completely changed as well. “With my old in ears, I would be pumping the click above everything else to make sure that I could still hear it and in a way, I was partly playing blind to the rest of the musicians and the actual track. The UE11s enable me to hear so much more detail, everything is crystal clear, and the isolation is good. Hearing everything in a lower volume enables me to separate things sonically. For the first time, I can hear the individual instruments in the track like the shaker and tambourine, and I can clearly hear what the guitarists and vocalists are doing even with the drums dialled into my mix. There is so much low end and headroom, the drums sound like cannons in my ears even at a relatively low volume but never get in the way of the other instruments.”

The change has flowed over to the online church services. “The UE11s have actually raised the level of my playing which has been very important to our church’s live stream,” Simon says. “Because we are streaming live, there is no re-take or editing, so it is imperative to lock in with the click and the other instruments and lay a solid foundation for the rest of the band. The UEs are definitely helping me to do that.”