

Earphones: Getting the Most From Your iPod/MP3 Player

by Roger Tashjian

▶ According to a nationwide survey conducted for Shure, a full 55% of iPod buyers replace the ear buds that come in the box. Many find they are not as comfortable as they should be and deliver poor-quality sound. If you're going to spend a few hundred dollars for your player, why not spring for better earphones? During a month of listening and many days in the gym with Alex Kava's *Whitewash*, Robert Crais's *The Watchman*, and Lisa Jackson's

Absolute Fear, I tested six of the many in-ear models available. I was aiming for a reasonable range of prices, comfortable design, and sound-blocking capability. All models tested come with multiple-size ear bud sleeves to enable a better fit. Here's what I found:

Future Sonics Atrio M8 [1]

The shape of these earphones provides a great fit and blocks all external noise. It comes with all the bells and

whistles—seven pairs of sleeves, a case, and cleaner. Of the six tested units, it had the best sound quality—very crisp and clear. Maybe you do get what you pay for.

iSkin Cerulean X1 [2]

A great sounding and comfortable unit that made the most of Alex Kava's *Whitewash*. Good clean sound with a ton of bass. The case is perfect for the pocket and makes storage very convenient.



Comparing Ear Buds

Model	List Price	Amazon Price	Pairs of Ear Bud Sleeves Included	Carrying Case	Web Site
[1] Future Sonics Atrio M8	\$199.00	\$159.00	7	Yes	futuresonics.com
[2] iSkin Cerulean X1	\$99.99	\$72.40	3	Yes	iskin.com
[3] ezGear ultraEars SX70	\$39.98	\$32.72	3	No	ezgear.com
[4] V-Moda Vibe	\$101.00	\$79.99	3	Yes	v-moda.com
[5] Shure SE110	\$99.99	\$89.99	6	Yes	shure.com
[6] Sennheiser CX300	\$89.95	\$48.99	3	No	sennheiserusa.com

Amazon Prices as of 2/21/08

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ezGear ultraEars SX70 [3]

The earphones are small and very lightweight, and the choice of three sizes of sleeves made for a comfortable fit. Can't beat the price on this one: For the value, I'd buy a couple—to have a backup.

V-Moda Vibe [4]

The best looking of the group and available in five different colors. The kit includes a plastic cord wrap that helps to manage the extra cable. The sound is vibrant. Bass Level Isolating Soft Silicone (BLISS) technology provides better fit and noise reduction.

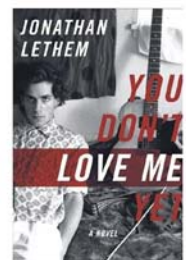
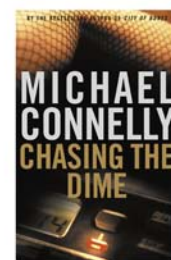
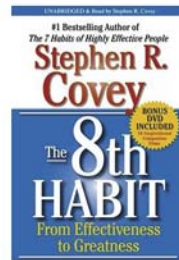
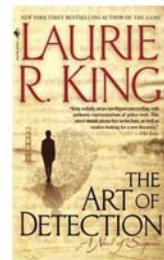
Shure SE110 [5]

Of the group tested, the SE110's curved design bent to fit into the ear canal and provided the best blocking of outside noise. The foam bud fittings were also the most comfortable of the included pairs. The mid-wire plug adds additional weight that some may find uncomfortable, but I felt it was a small sacrifice for better performance. Also included in the kit is a cleaning tool to ensure continued performance and a carrying case to hold the extra buds.

Sennheiser CX300 [6]

I rated the CX300 the best buy of those tested in terms of sound, weight, fit, and reasonable price point. The asymmetrical cable can be worn on either side of the body, making the earphones easy to use with a player in an armband holder.

With any headphones, I highly recommend that you set the volume limits (available on most MP3 players and iPods) to ensure that you are protecting your hearing capabilities. Be sure to lock the volume on your children's players too. Mine complain, but I'll deal with that knowing I'm helping prevent future hearing loss.



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