

Sontronics Orpheus Multipattern Condenser Microphone

This LDC offers beauty, build quality, performance, and value.

British-designed and Chinese-built, the Sontronics Orpheus is an attractive, uniquely styled, multi-pattern, large-diaphragm condenser (LDC) microphone that can notably inspire those that stand before it. And yes, it sounds very good, too.

Features

Orpheus features omni, cardioid, and figure-eight polar patterns and a 10 dB cut/boost function; these selections are adjustable via two dedicated three-position switches on the front of Orpheus' rectangular and relatively large [4 1/4" x 3 1/2" x 1 1/2"] zinc alloy body. The large body is mated to the mic's large spherical head, a wire basket surrounding its 1.07" dual-diaphragm, internally shock-mounted capsule: its portly belly measures 11" in circumference. As a result, very few local reflections are created by the basket, lending to the Orpheus' "open" sonic qualities.

Orpheus handles maximum SPL levels of 125 dB and has an equivalent noise level of 16 dB (A-weighted). Frequency response is 20 Hz to 20 kHz with bumps down low, up top, and a few in between: most notable is a 5 dB hump from 40 Hz to around 100 Hz, a 3 dB rise between 2-4 kHz, then a 6-8 dB increase from around 7 kHz to 12 kHz.

The Orpheus kit is well packaged in a large wooden box branded with the Sontronics name and logo; inside, the mic is cradled in velveteen-covered foam — quite nice. The mic provides a built-in yoke mount, which is sturdy and easy to adjust, albeit less than universally positionable; in most cases, I found that hanging the Orpheus upside down is the best way to position it for recording vocals, my most common application. Its XLR connector is on the back of the body, at the bottom.

In Use

The Orpheus resided in my personal microphone pool for several months, where it was used on a variety of lead and backing vocals, saxophone, acoustic guitars, distant guitar amp placement, and various room and ambient applications. It was usable in all applications and, almost half the time, it was the first choice when placed next to 4-5 similarly priced LDCs. A few times it was chosen over

mics that cost twice as much.

Orpheus' presence bumps are quite flattering to lead vocals, both male and female. It offers a comparably full, rich, airy, and "slightly forward" quality to vocals tracked in cardioid pattern. While the mic may be aesthetically vintage, Art Deco, in design it is strictly "pro-grade modern LDC" in operation.

I especially enjoyed the Orpheus on sax, where its frequency variations emphasized the desirable textures and details of pop sax performances. In lending his notable skills to a Carolina Beach Music production I recently recorded, jazz saxophonist Matt Kosma commented on its overall great sound during playback of his tracks. [Positive feedback from a highly skilled musician on microphone selection for his/her instrument is always significant to me.]

In room and ambient applications, I mostly used the Orpheus set to omni; a bit of heavy-handed compression made it the "secret sauce" for drum room tracks in more than one project.

In every application, the striking physical design of the Orpheus sparked inspiration in performers that saw and used it — assured, and maybe even challenged, privileged, or rewarded by its presence. Even sitting next to a \$3k-plus German LDC, the Orpheus generated questions, positive comments and raised eyebrows. An LDC that gets 'em talking about your studio for only \$519 street? Not a bad investment.

Most importantly, the Orpheus is very well built; I found it to be a clear cut above the average Chinese mic export. Hats off to Sontronics for conducting off-shore manufacturing with true excellence. Finally, if any doubts of long-lasting build quality linger, Sontronics allows potential buyers to rest easy with a limited lifetime warranty covering its entire product line.

Summary

The Sontronics Orpheus offers beauty, build quality, performance, and value to either budget-conscious professionals with a need to expand their LDC palette or serious self-recordists with mic money to spend. The Orpheus is a flexible multi-pattern LDC that can visually woo those you record (yet not sonically disappoint).

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