

DAVE FOISTER remains amazed at the performance and price of the SE range – the Gemini is no exception.

SE Electronics is now sufficiently established to need little introduction. The SE range of microphones, manufactured in China in partnership with Sonic Distribution, has set new benchmarks in what we can expect from microphones with an entry-level price — these can hold their heads up in the most exalted company. Continued acquaintance with the Z3300A has convinced me that this is one of the best all-rounders to appear for some time at any price.

A Mighty Mic

It's not only the performance that belies SE's price point — it's the appearance and image too, along with the breadth of the range. Thus there are several models of visually-impressive valve microphone, of which the most striking is the Gemini. Its sheer size prompted

no polar pattern selection — this is cardioid pure and simple. It relies on its own headroom and low noise floor to deal with the dynamic extremes thrown at it, and on your console do deal with any LF problems. But what it lacks in bells and whistles it certainly makes up for in client-impressing presence — this is a microphone you notice as soon as you walk into the room. More importantly, its simplicity becomes irrelevant in the light of its performance.

There's a sound you expect, or at least hope for, from a microphone that looks like this — that elusive combination of warmth and detail, sparkle and presence without harshness. Many valve microphones disappoint in one or more of these aspects, or deliberately choose to focus on one area at the expense of another. Each is useful in its own way, but what you really hope to hear when you push the fader up is that smooth, liquid sound



SE ELECTRONICS GEMINI DUAL-VALVE CONDENSER MIC

one friend to speculate as to how much damage you could do if you hit someone over the head with it — this is a seriously big microphone, with a weight to match its size, suggesting a necessarily robust chassis. Its name comes from the presence of not one but two valves within, clearly visible through a perforated area of the case at the back. The reference to twins goes slightly awry when you realise that the valves are not identical; one is a 12AX7 in the main microphone circuitry, while the other is a 12AU7 used in the transformerless output stage. The capsule, just visible through the tight mesh grille, is a suitably large cardioid-only assembly — apart from its appearance, this is a remarkably unpretentious, simple microphone, designed to do a basic job well.

To help lug this monster about without damage, it comes in an even bigger, more rugged flightcase than its stablemates. This houses the microphone itself, in turn enclosed in a smart wooden case, along with its dedicated power supply, the connecting cable, and the standard SE suspension mount. The cable could do with being longer, as they could in all the SE valve mics I've tried and it's also worth pointing out the importance of checking where the legs of your microphone stand are — if the boom arm is hanging out at any kind of angle unsupported by a leg in the same direction, this microphone is heavy enough to risk toppling the whole thing over.

Having got it where you want it and hooked it up, you'll search in vain for something to tweak or adjust. The power supply is just that; mains in, power and signal connections to the microphone, audio out at mic level, and that's it, apart from an LED that in familiar helpful SE style flashes on power-up until the system is warmed up and ready for use. Similarly there's nothing on the microphone body itself, so there's no pad, no filters,

that only a pedigree valve design can give. And that's what SE has achieved with the Gemini.

Vocals are the obvious fodder for a microphone that presents itself like this, and this one doesn't let you down. Singers commented on its detail and clarity, while never complaining of any harshness. It remained smooth and warm throughout, with proximity effect available up close when required but always under control. But a real test was a classical violin. Most inexpensive valve microphones don't get a look-in with this instrument, which exposes any tendency to a hard brittle top end and gets the sound rejected out of hand by the player. Recorded flat, the Gemini retained all the character and sweetness of a top-flight old violin in expert hands, while revealing all the subtleties of the playing. No comment from the violinist, which is about as good a compliment as it could have had.

Conclusion

The Gemini is not without its drawbacks. While cardioid is probably the most useful configuration overall, variable polar patterns with this intrinsic sound would be a powerful combination; and the microphone's size, weight and stand-mounting arrangements make it one of the most awkward models to put up and point confidently at your source I've come across. To be honest though, the other factors are insignificant compared with the sheer quality of sound the Gemini produces. Another triumph for SE. □

THE REVIEWER

Since doing the Surrey (UK) Tonmeister course, Dave Foister has produced, engineered, and played on innumerable recordings in the classical, commercial, folk, jazz, and TV music areas, as well as live sound operation. He currently manages the Guildhall School of Music & Drama recording department, and spends spare time (!) watching racing cars and wishing he was driving them.

INFORMATION

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