

SE ELECTRONICS Z3300a

We thought the SE 2200a was good, but recording with a fixed cardioid mic is like listening to music through one ear. The Z3300a could open your mind to omnidirectional and figure-of-8 recording. **Huw Price** switches over.

Traditional microphone techniques were developed using the multi-pattern microphones that became industry standards after the war. This was partly down to necessity, because engineers had to record straight to 2-track stereo (or even mono). It was also a matter of choice, because multiple pickup patterns enable you to capture room ambience and various interpretations of a stereo image beyond the slightly clinical cardioid coincident pair. Old workhorses such as Neumann's U47, U67 and U87 or AKG's C12 and C414 were all you saw in pro recording studios, but the plethora

pattern-selector switch in the middle offering figure-of-8, cardioid and omnidirectional pickup patterns. The body is made from brass and the capsule is protected behind a double-layer mesh grille. Inside, the output transformer looks heavy duty and the components are neatly installed on printed circuit boards. The grey collar beneath the grille also has switches for attenuation and bass rolloff.

General pattern

In a direct comparison, the cardioid setting of the Z3300a sounds very similar to the Ic15. The Ic15 has a smoother, more inviting sound and

useful, and when playing into the rear of the capsule the resulting sound is slightly smoother than from the front. Our least favourite setting was figure-of-8, which sounded a little pinched and hollow in the mid-range, but it did produce a sharply focused sound. The -10dB pad meant that – despite our best efforts – we couldn't overload the Z3300a, and it seemed that the tone warmed up slightly with the pad engaged.

Up close

The Z3300a is clearly designed for close-quarters action. Although it's not as seductive as the Ic15, it does have an attenuation pad and a bass rolloff switch. These features, coupled with the multiple pickup patterns, make the Z3300a a much better prospect for general-purpose recording work. **MTM**

An affordable, multi-pattern condenser with enough flexibility to handle any recording situation.

of affordable condenser mics that hit the microphone market around a decade ago were products that were built to a strict budget. This meant omitting features such as multiple pickup patterns, bass rolloff and attenuation pads to help keep production costs low.

Now that things have settled down and a few companies are edging ahead, they are maintaining their competitive edge by re-introducing features that old-school engineers took for granted. Once again we are seeing attenuation pads and bass rolloffs, but most exciting of all are the professionally spec'ed multi-pattern condenser mics for bargain prices.

Forging ahead

Foremost among the new breed of microphone manufacturers is SE Electronics. The Z3300a we are looking at this month is part of SE's new line. Currently it's the company's top-of-the-range FET, solid-state microphone and it's distinguished from its kid brother – the 2200a – by a larger body and a three-way

the top end is sweeter, too, but the Z3300a has a bit more sparkle and it's more focused and tight in the low end. Ultimately, these are exactly the differences you would expect to hear between valve and solid-state microphones. Neither one is better; it's more a matter of personal choice and suitability for the application than anything else.

The Z3300a is considerably more refined than its 2200a stablemate, especially in the upper frequency range. The Z3300a has a tight cardioid response with effective rear rejection. Off-axis, the volume level drops fairly dramatically, with a corresponding loss of high frequencies, but that's exactly what you'd expect from cardioid. If you want to use the Z3300a for ambient recording, you can switch to omni. This is a lovely setting that produces a very 'joined-up' tone with a smoother top and a better overall frequency balance.

Tests showed that the Z3300a, like all other large-capsule omni condensers, is directional at high frequencies. In practice this is quite



Z330A
Manufacturer SE Electronics
Price £299
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www.sonic-distribution.com

SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Large-capsule valve condenser
- Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz
- Sensitivity: 16mV/Pa - 36±2dB
- Polar patterns: cardioid, omni, figure-of-8
- Impedance: <=200Ω
- Max SPL: 125dB
- Transformer-balanced output
- -10dB pad and bass rolloff
- Power requirements: phantom power 48V (±4V)

WHY BUY

- Very clean, clear sound
- Good detail
- Tight low end
- Decent suspension mount and case
- Handles anything you throw at it

WALK ON BY

- Suspension mount too big
- Less flattering than the Ic15 for vocals
- Off-axis cardioid response not brilliant

VERDICT

An affordable, multi-pattern condenser with a decent sound, great looks and enough flexibility to handle any recording situation.



METHOD SPOT New techniques

A pair of fixed cardioids is acceptable, but the various pickup patterns of two Z3300a mics would enable spaced stereo, mid-and-side or even Blumlein stereo with crossed figure-of-8s. If you haven't tried these techniques, you don't know what you're missing.