WHAT IS IT?

Phantom-powered ribbon mic.

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Great design
2 Low noise figures
3 Good value

SPECS

Frequency response: 20Hz to 20kHz
Sensitivity: 12mV/Pa – 38dB +/-1dB (0dB = 1V/Pa @ 1kHz)
Polar Pattern: Figure-of-eight
Impedance: <=150 Ohms
Equivalent Noise: 14dB (A-weighted)
Max SPL for 0.5% THD @ 1kHz: 135dB
Power source: Phantom power 48V (+/-4V)
Connector: XLR

Sontronics Sigma | £429

With ribbon mics experiencing a bit of a renaissance, ***Jon Musgrave*** looks at one rather intriguing option

For many years, save a few battered old examples, ribbon mics went totally out of fashion. Whether this was due to their sound and general vulnerability or something more specific, such as their typically low output level, is not entirely clear. But worry not because this time they're back for good (probably), and a perfect example of the new wave is the Sontronics Sigma.

Ribbon activity

The Sigma has been around for a few months now and has been well received. At £429, although affordable, it's clearly not entry level. So what's the story? First up, like the majority of ribbons, it's a figure-of-eight pick-up pattern. However, it's also phantom powered (which isn't commonplace for a ribbon). This means a reasonably healthy output level, and a good-for-a-ribbon-mic noise figure (14dB A-weighted). So if you were looking for a comparison, the Sigma is along similar lines to Royer's RF122 but at a fraction of the cost.

Although the specs may be similar, the Sigma is a much chunkier mic. From its retro-style casing to the slightly out-there shock mount, this is one of the most distinctive looking mics I've seen all year. So far so good, but let's get down to business.

Box fresh

The Sigma comes in a miniature flight case (about a foot by 9 inches), and that leaves plenty of space for both mic and shock to sit comfortably in their protective foam. The mic itself is quite a bruiser (they're individually serial numbered, by the way). In part this is the large magnet integral to the ribbon design, but the enclosure feels pretty solid too.

With the mic installed on the clamp it all looks very impressive (and quite heavy). This means a little extra elbow grease is needed to tighten the clamp and ensure that the microphone doesn't droop unexpectedly.

On the sound front the Sigma sounds very fresh. Directional mics tend to have enhanced proximity, and this is very noticeable here. On voice, for example it's easy to get too close. In fact, it's best to give the mic about a foot, which is probably more distance than you'd give a condenser. With guitars, the same applies, otherwise the low mids sound too boxy.

But the surprise is percussion. The Sigma has an ability to capture the sound without harshness (crisp but not too fizzy), and sounds bright and airy, even though it lacks the top-end lift many condensers have. On similarly bright percussion – such as cymbals – it's a similar story. I suspect a pair would make good overheads.

The figure-of-eight pattern does a good job of opening up the sound. If you're in a lively room, this will become part of the take. Obviously if the room sounds great this could be ideal. Equally though, if the room's not good you'll probably want a cardioid on hand.

Options open

Of the three Sontronics mics I've tried, the Sigma is my favourite. I don't think I'd want it to be my only mic, but as a second or third option it adds a different dimension. Plus in modern style it's robust and quiet. People expect quite a bit for their money these days, but £429 is a good price for a well-made and stylish ribbon mic. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Stand out from the crowd! This phantom-powered ribbon mic will add a new dimension to your sound.