

# Microtech Gefell UM930

Still representing one of the best kept secrets in the microphone world, Microtech Gefell does tend to hide its light under its bushel despite the quality and pedigree of its products. **JON THORNTON** uncovers a true new classic.

**A**S FAR AS design goes, and I'm talking about form rather than content here, most new microphones these days tend to fall into one of three camps. Camp number one is to rather self-consciously ape the 'vintage' look of days gone by. The second is to throw caution to the winds and go for something completely wacky. And the third is to keep things conservative — mostly by companies

who've been around long enough to know that they don't have to try too hard.

This makes the UM930 from Microtech Gefell a little hard to classify. Microtech Gefell's historical connection to Neumann is not as well known as it should be and how Neumann moved its operations to Gefell from Berlin during the Second World War. The end of hostilities, and the subsequent geopolitical changes that followed, meant that the two headquarters found themselves on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, Neumann continued to operate from the two bases, maintaining communication both legally and illegally as far as the East German authorities were concerned. The construction of the Berlin Wall made this communication more difficult, and eventually Neumann in Gefell was transformed into a state controlled outfit, but still manufacturing microphones, including the legendary M7 capsule, in the tried and tested Neumann way. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the company was returned to private ownership, but now trading under the new name of Microtech Gefell.

Given this history and provenance, you'd forgive MG for adopting the conservative strategy, but both externally and under the skin, the UM930 doesn't quite fit the mould. First impressions are of a beautifully engineered microphone, which manages to look modern and classic at the same time. The review model shipped with an integral swivel mount that has a touch of the 'Thunderbirds' about it, but isn't trying too hard to make a statement.

Functionally, the UM930 is a variable pattern large diaphragm capacitor microphone. The dual capsules are completely independent of each other (i.e. no shared backplate), and feature sophisticated internal shockmounting to minimise mechanical vibration. A series of rubber 'O' rings adorn the main body of the microphone, but these aren't simply decoration, as they allow a firm grip to be had when selecting the polar pattern, which is achieved by twisting the entire centre section of the microphone. This flicks smoothly and precisely from position to position with rifle-bolt like accuracy, and offers a choice of omni, wide cardioid, cardioid, hypercardioid and fig-8 polar patterns.

Electrical switching is actually performed by reed-relays, which mute the output giving pop-free pattern selection even when the mic is powered and gained up. A small green LED just inside the forward side of the head grille lights up when phantom power is applied, and switches on and off as the patterns are changed to reflect this muting.

Output is transformerless, and the quoted self-noise is extremely low at 7dBA. According to MG, one of the ways this has been achieved is by decoupling the phantom power from the microphone's electronics using an opto-isolator circuit, allegedly removing any noise component that may be present in the power source.

Plugging the microphone in suggests no reason to doubt the published noise figure — this is a very

quiet microphone. Initial tests using (relatively thin) male vocals with the wide cardioid pattern showed a very controlled, useable sound straight out of the box. Proximity effect is smooth and progressive, and even very close up there is no hint of boominess to the response. What is very nice though, is the way in which the mic works around the 1-3kHz region of both male and female vocals. There is a detectable presence lift, but spread very evenly across a wide range, which means that with almost any voice it does the trick of getting a nice intimate sound while never sounding too peaky. A more noticeable bump around 10k gives a little bit of air to the sound, but without exaggerating sibilance too much.

Overall, on vocals the UM930 was a winner. Its overall tonality is not quite as 'in your face' as a Brauner Phantom, not quite as brutally honest as a 414, and not quite as soft around the edges as a U87. But while these three microphones can sound absolutely gorgeous with one voice, and completely unsuitable on another, the UM930 seemed consistently good with every voice I tried it on.

Moving to a slightly different application, I tried it on a cello while recording some pedal notes to thicken up a synth pad. Some experimentation with the various pick-up patterns proved that the on-axis response does change quite significantly across the three cardioid settings, with progressively more HF lift as the pattern narrows. Far from being a problem, though, this proved to be a very effective way of 'tuning' the mic to pull some of the string detail out of the instrument. More impressive was the way in which the UM930 remained very consistent and predictable at different distances, helped by the fact that the off-axis response of the cardioid patterns is noticeably less coloured than something like a 414.

On the minus side, despite the internal shockmount arrangements, the fixed clip on the review model didn't offer quite the degree of mechanical isolation I'd have liked and, while this might seem minor, there doesn't seem to be an easy way to change this for the optional suspension mount as it is physically part of the body. In other words, you have to know which mount you need when you order the microphone.

Other than that, MG has produced a jewel of a microphone that succeeds in looking and sounding like a modern classic. Highly recommended. ■



## PROS

Very flexible in application; nice tonal balance; quiet; elegantly packaged.

## CONS

Changing fixed clip for suspension mount not straightforward or easy; not much else.

## EXTRAS

Microtech Gefell's M 990 vacuum tube-condenser uses a large diameter gold sputtered plastic membrane and has a valve preamp equipped with a pentode working as a triode. The complete system includes the M 990 in a wooden case, N 920.1 power supply, C 92.1 microphone cable and an elastic suspension.



## Contact

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