

DAVE FOISTER
discovered the
indispensible
qualities of this
recently upgraded
microphone.



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 mixing and theatre 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.

Since sticking its head above the parapet as a serious microphone manufacturer in its own right, China's SE Electronics hasn't stood still for five minutes. New models appear with frightening regularity, and the original range is already on the way to a complete overhaul, with new looks and enhanced performance while still delivering the impressive value for money that the company has consistently shown.

Revised And Updated

The latest microphone to receive the upgrade and revision treatment is the Z3300, now reissued as the Z3300A. As with previous revamps, the A is to all intents and purposes a new model, retaining little more than the overall appearance and intended applications of the original. It remains resolutely solid-state, despite its vintage looks; it's a big side-fire multi-pattern condenser, with a 1.07" super large diaphragm, bigger than the normal 1" capsules normally available on the market. This gives extended bass frequency response without degrading the high frequencies for optimal full range response. Gone are

SE ELECTRONICS Z3300A MICROPHONE

the graphite body sections of the earlier range, and the powder grey finish of the valve models doesn't appear either, apart from a small detail ring highlighting the engraved control markings; instead the body is a satin silver finish, which in conjunction with neat crisp graphics and well-placed switches gives a good modern retro look which is bound to impress the client. It comes as standard with the same big fat suspension mount as used on the much heavier valve models, which makes for a very solid, reassuring look and feel to the whole assembly, even if it means probing into difficult corners is not easy. The mount screws on to the base of the body with a big knurled ring, making it much more secure the type that clips round the body. A nice touch is the inclusion of a spare elastic band for the mount. The whole kit comes in a typical SE flightcase-style aluminium box, with a tough foam cutout lining, that looks pretty much bomb proof.

The facilities on the Z3300A are everything you'd hope for in a microphone of this kind. A full complement of three switches offers pad, low-cut filter and polar pattern selection, the patterns on offer being the standard set of cardioid, omni and figure-of-eight. This lends itself to a lot of options when used for stereo, although the size and mounting style of the body makes the construction of X-Y and MS arrays a little awkward. Fortunately I was provided with a pair, so I was at least able to check them out as spaced omnis.

Indeed first impressions of the Z3300A soon had me confident with the idea of checking it out on anything and everything. Often a microphone will declare itself pretty quickly as being good in some areas while probably not suitable for some other things — not so with this one, which seemed comfortable with any source material I could find. In particular, the tendency of some less expensive microphones to try to impress with presence has been avoided here in favour of a much more neutral, natural approach. The edge that can have sax players asking where

their warmth has gone doesn't happen here, but nothing's missed either, with a top end that goes on forever, and a revealing transparency. Similarly with trumpets, where the slightest hint of excess brightness in a microphone can spoil the ensemble, the Z3300A gives all of the sound without colouring it. Solo strings sounded full with a natural brightness, and a whole variety of wind instruments benefited from the same qualities.

The obvious places to try spaced omnis were piano and drum overheads. On piano the image was spacious and natural, with the joined-up spread that comes from a good off-axis frequency response. Factor in the SPL handling necessary to deal with a kit, and this is a very useful tool. I also used the pair close in on a guitarist's two-amp rig, which it handled easily.

But perhaps the biggest test the Z3300A got was a classical soprano, one with a particularly powerful voice that had given problems in two previous sessions with another engineer — something somewhere always seemed to be on the edge of overload. Thinking by now that the microphone was invincible, I decided to risk it on

this voice — with the pad in — and was astonished to find that it took it in its stride and gave a superb result, one that the singer was instantly happy with. A more mellow jazz vocal was easy meat, with just the combination of clarity and close-up warmth that the voice needed.

Conclusion

The Z3300A, you'll have realised by now, is a hugely impressive all-rounder, but without the blandness that might imply. There was nothing I was afraid to try it on, and nothing it failed to impress with. They've been up on stands ever since I had them, and I've reached for them first on every session.

The new microphone appears as UK distributor Sonic Distribution has announced an even closer relationship with SE Electronics itself, becoming worldwide suppliers of the range and even acquiring part ownership of the company. This will see the opening of local offices in several territories, starting with the States, and an even closer partnership with SE in terms of microphone design and meeting market needs, targeted specifically at the middle ground rather than entry-level products. If the Z3300A represents the fruits of this collaboration, the future looks very bright indeed. Forget preconceived ideas about microphones at this price and try it. □

INFORMATION

- Ⓔ SE Electronics Z3300A £299 incl. VAT.
- Ⓐ European Distributor: Sonic Distribution Ltd,
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