

Sontronics Helios and Omega mics

Technical data

Helios

- ❖ Response: 20Hz-20kHz
- ❖ Sensitivity: 20mV/Pa -34dB within 2dB (0dB=1V/Pa 1000Hz)
- ❖ Polar pattern: variable from Omni to Figure of 8
- ❖ Impedance: <=200Ω
- ❖ Equivalent noise level: 18dB(A-weighted)
- ❖ Max SPL for 0.5% THD@1kHz: 125dB
- ❖ Power source: SPS-1 230/115V power supply only
- ❖ Connector: microphone, eight-pin connector
- ❖ Power supply: 3-pin XLR

Omega

- ❖ Response: 20Hz-20kHz
- ❖ Sensitivity: 25mV/Pa -34dB within 2dB (0dB=1V/Pa 1kHz)
- ❖ Polar Pattern: Cardioid
- ❖ Impedance: <=200Ω
- ❖ Equivalent noise level: 18dB (A-weighted)
- ❖ Max SPL for 0.5% THD@1kHz: 125dB
- ❖ Power source: SPS-2 230/115V power supply only
- ❖ Connector: microphone, eight-pin connector
- ❖ Power supply: 3-pin XLR

- ❖ Helios, £699 (ex VAT);
- ❖ Omega £649 (ex VAT)

Trevor Coley first set up Omnisonic International Distribution in January 2003 and since the summer of 2004 has been working on his own microphone project. As revealed exclusively in *PSNE* February 2005, Coley has now launched Sontronics and two of the products he is manufacturing and distributing are the Sontronics Helios variable pattern (omni to figure-of-8) tube condenser and Omega tube cardioid condenser mics.



Both units are extremely rugged with an impressive build quality, looking and feeling solid and workman-like. The mics come in sturdy wooden boxes housed within aluminium padded flight cases – the only irritating aspect is that there's no indication which particular mic one is accessing until you open the box! Also contained in the

case is the 230/115V power supply, the head lead with eight-pin connectors and two mains leads, one terminating with a British mains plug, the other a European one.

The Omega (cardioid) case also contains the mic shock-mount. The Helios on the other hand has a well thought-out and useful direct mount clamp that allows the mic to be rotated essentially through 360°, although in practice once the mic cable is attached to the back of the mic this would not be the case, obviously.

Both mics have a switchable -10dB cut and a "low-cut filter". The filter is set at 75Hz, as are so many, which does seem high but apparently this was decided after much consultation with various cognoscenti. It does seem strange, that after designing units having such discernible warmth, the manufacturers have slavishly followed the 75Hz convention.

In use, the Omega behaved very well indeed: warm, rich and an uncluttered top-end, apparent immediately. Generally this is a good all-round cardioid mic that could

one that was both transparent and realistic, responding well to EQ (in this case the on-board AMS Neve 88R EQ) was used. The results did make us wish that we had two to review so we could make some stereo tests; mic manufacturers please note when submitting units for review! The large 1.07-inch capsule is isolated away from the body of the microphone and this design has definitely paid off here.

When the Omega was "suspended" upside down with the capsule at the bottom of the body instead of the capsule above the body the unit sounded both warmer and more present. This difference in sound quality depending on the orientation of the mic is often what happens and it's always worth experimenting with your new arrivals!

Interesting to note was the fact that the manufacturers have obviously paid attention to making the "proximity effect" as attractive as possible: vocals did become richer without being too boomy. Using the proximity effect is not a technique favoured by this reviewer;



The Omega mic in its shock-mount cradle

much nicer using the desk or out-board EQ to overcome any problems around that frequency area. This mic is superb for any application requiring a complete, warm sound without a hint of harshness – great for orchestral recording and acoustic instruments.

There did seem to be a very slight exaggeration around the 200Hz-300Hz area, but really nothing too much to worry about. We hasten to add that this observation was made from purely aural tests and not from any test equipment readings.

The special direct-mount clamp was easy to use and allowed one to position and angle the Helios very precisely. What is more, it stayed in place! This is not always the case with some mic mounts.

All in all, the Omega and Helios mics represent exceptionally good value for money in terms of build quality, presentation and audio fidelity. We can only imagine that these units will shortly be found in use in many studios and the manufacturers should be praised for their efforts thus far.

HAYDN BENDALL

CONTACT ❖ SONTRONICS

WEB ❖ www.sontronics.com

CONTACT ❖ SONIC8 LTD (UK DISTRIBUTOR)

WEB ❖ www.sonic8.com



The Helios mic with power supply

however, given that the effect is often employed, we can imagine that many users will find the described attribute attractive.

The Helios is a really incredible value-for-money mic and performed faultlessly in our recording tests (once again, having two would have been helpful). The SPS-1 power supply unit has a variable pattern control which we would have preferred to be switchable, as recalling set-ups could be achieved with a greater degree of accuracy.

The 75Hz roll-off really does seem high when using the Helios. The warmth and sensitivity of the unit, achieved by the dual diaphragm capsule and valve circuitry seems to be scuppered somewhat when the filter is employed –

easily become a real workhorse in any studio. We got instantly pleasing results when recording vocals, acoustic guitars and solo violin. Using the mic on piano also gave a good impression,

even multichannel mic – over the last year we've spent a lot of time with our customers researching new ideas and concepts. As a direct result, we are now working on several new products – not just microphones – to be released under the Sontronics brand...

"When? All I will say at this moment in time is that *Pro Sound News Europe* will be the first to know when they are ready for release!"

have a 'thinning' effect to the signal output and this suggests that this cut-off point may not be the most flexible, or suitable, for all types of recording. This is certainly a subject that we will spend time researching in more depth.

"The labelling on the box? OK, you've got me there! Identification shall be somewhat more obvious on future packaging, I promise! "With regard to future manufacturing plans – say, for a stereo or

View from the top

Trevor Coley,
managing director



❖ "First, to address the low-cut filter set at 75Hz. Rather than straying from an industry standard, we chose a low-cut filter setting at 75Hz, that being the lowest fundamental frequency of the male voice. However, the filter can