



Sontronics ORPHEUS

Few microphones can claim to have been inspired by Greek mythology, but does Sontronics' Orpheus deliver a sound fit for the gods? Mark Cousins puts it through its paces.

KEY FEATURES

- Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz
- Sensitivity: 20mV/Pa -34dB ±2dB
- Polar pattern: omni, cardioid and figure-8
- Impedance: <=200Ω
- Equivalent noise level: 16dB (A-weighted)
- Max SPL for 0.5% THD @ 1,000Hz: 125dB
- Phantom power 48V ±4V

MEASURING UP

If you can sacrifice the polar patterns, you might be able to pick up Blue's Baby Bottle for around the same price as the Orpheus, which offers an alternative solution if you're just interested in recording vocals. For a cheaper multi-pattern mic, take a look at Rode's NT2000, which also has filter and pad.

ORPHEUS

Manufacturer **Sontronics**

Price **£330**

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Sontronics is a relative newcomer to the world of microphones, but on the face of it, the company's first few products demonstrate a desire to produce high-quality, affordable recording tools. Make no mistake, however: the sub-£500 condenser microphone bracket is an overpopulated area, with many manufacturers vying for our attention. To be successful involves producing a mic with just enough character (although not too much character; transparency should always be paramount) at a price that won't break the bank.

The Orpheus – named after the Greek god who apparently moved even stones and trees with the beauty of his music – is Sontronics' attempt at producing such a mic. But forget moving trees; will this modern-day Orpheus enchant your ears so much that you part with some cash?

First appearances

On first appearances, the Orpheus certainly looks like an interesting microphone, with a distinctive spherical basket holding the dual-diaphragm capsule, zinc casing and the unique 'rear placement' of the XLR port. Promisingly, the microphone features a three-way polar pattern switch (figure-of-8, omni and cardioid respectively), and a pad switch that as well as attenuating the input (-10dB), can also boost it (+10dB). To finish things off, the Orpheus is presented in a neat wooden box.

We tested the Orpheus both for general recording duties (percussion and acoustic guitar) and vocal overdubs on top of a full orchestra – a tough challenge for any microphone. Firstly, we were pleasantly surprised by its sensitivity, both with the pad off and the signal boost set to +10dB. Secondly – and most importantly – the Orpheus revealed a flattering sound, although not at the expense of unpleasantly pushing the top end of the signal. All too often, these types of microphones tend to exhibit a harsh presence boost, rather than a gentle lift in the 'air' range of frequencies. The Orpheus, therefore, is adept at handling high-frequency sounds, without become fatiguing on the ears.

Bass tip

Another pleasing quality was the gentle extension of bass frequencies, and a warm proximity boost created by close mic'ing. When switched to its omni setting, the Orpheus exuded even more class, and works well as part of a spaced-pair arrangement for stereo recording. With the lack of bass rolloff, however, the Orpheus could struggle with some male vocalists or with instruments exhibiting unwanted bass frequencies – although this is nothing a good EQ can't fix.

Interestingly, Sontronics claims to have fine-tuned the microphone's performance under laboratory conditions, in an attempt to closely match the sound of other leading microphones. To our ears, the company seems to have arrived at a good response characteristic that results in a relatively natural sound, with little need to process the output afterwards (other than, maybe, a little bass rolloff). On a more minor note, we struggled with the rear-mounted XLR socket – if the microphone is angled slightly backwards, it can make inserting the XLR cable tricky. However, Sontronics highlights the fact that this route reduces the potential for cable strain and retains the natural direction of the cable down the boom.

Fit for the gods?

The design and development of the Orpheus suggests that Sontronics is as interested in producing a microphone that sounds good as it is in keeping manufacturing costs down. The rewards are a microphone that can be used to record a variety of instruments, without your growing tired of its sound. Like any other professional sound tool, its sonic fingerprint remains light, gently enhancing sounds and presenting them in a balanced way. Add to that the number of polar patterns on offer – great for Blumlein and middle-and-side recording – and you have a tool for almost every occasion. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Flattering, but relatively neutral sound
- Good bass extension
- Multiple pickup patterns
- Very sensitive

WALK ON BY

- No bass rolloff
- Box could be sturdier

VERDICT

In a competitive market, the Sontronics Orpheus delivers a polished sound with plenty of features. Ideal for the discerning engineer who wants more than just another cardioid.

