

# SONTRONICS

## STC-20

Despite a very good reputation, Sontronics seem to produce a lot of mic for a modest outlay, so is there a catch? **Words:** Simon Croft

**There are** a lot of differences between a big-budget recording and a home demo, which helps to explain why an hour-or-so in a world-class studio will cost you about the same as the asking price of this Sontronics mic.

But the good news is that a decent condenser microphone can get you a lot closer to making professional-quality recordings. For starters, it will bring a clarity and detail to the sound of your vocals that a cheap mic won't achieve. That in itself will help to lift your recordings up above 'bedroom demo' status.

Of course, when you're overdubbing, you can also use that same condenser mic on backing vocals, acoustic guitar, pianos and the like, which will do a lot to raise the quality of the whole track. (In fact, if you're putting guitars and bass through a preamp, and using drum loops or samples, that one mic pretty much covers all your recording needs?)

So is the Sontronics STC-20 a 'decent condenser'? After all, it doesn't cost much more than an up-market stage mic, so you seem to be getting a lot for your money.

Well, it certainly looks the part, with its black satin finish and gold trim. (And if there's one thing that inspires confidence in a singer, it's a mic that looks the part – so looks matter, even in the studio.)

It also sports the one thing that nearly all top-quality vocal recording mics have: a one-inch capsule with a gold-sputtered diaphragm. In case you don't know, here's why that matters. Unlike a stage mic, which works like a loudspeaker in reverse, condenser mics have an assembly called the capsule that looks a bit like a miniature drum. But instead of a drum head you can hit with a stick, it has an incredibly fine diaphragm that is very delicate. So delicate, in fact, that even moisture and dirt can stop it working properly. Gold, of course, doesn't corrode, making it an excellent metal to coat the diaphragm with. As mic diaphragms go, one inch is fairly large and its large-capsule condensers that give that classic, larger-than-life, vocal sound that gives recordings so much class.

### Flattering sounds

Happily, the STC-20 delivers everything it promises. In real life I haven't got that big a voice but with this mic working for me, I sounded really rich and vibrant. It certainly flatters and male voice and with a frequency response measured at 20Hz-20kHz (the same as a CD), it will do the same for a female voice. In fact, condenser mics are renowned for their clear, sparkling top end - and this one is no exception. It's that 'hi-fi' quality that makes it easy to get a vocal to stand out in a mix, without making it too loud.

It makes a very nice job of acoustic guitar as well. A 12-string in particular sounds massive but with that high-end shimmer that

makes any guitar sound that bit more expensive. The only thing I'd suggest is keeping an open mind about mic placement. If you put a large capsule condenser over the sound hole of a guitar, it's likely to sound boomy but move it over the 12th fret and back it away a bit and you'd think it was a different mic. I'm not saying it's the only position that will give you decent guitar sound but it's a good starting point.

Now, £135 isn't a trivial amount of money for most of us but you can still pay an awful lot more for a condenser mic, which makes us wonder where the corners have been cut? Fortunately, the sound quality of this mic is spot on, the savings are made in the options and accessories. Unlike a lot of mics of this type, there is no 'pad', or attenuator switch. For vocals, that's not normally such a big deal but you are likely to overload it if you are recording brass and I definitely wouldn't suggest it for drums.

Similarly, the padded flightcase is an option, as is the shock-mount cradle. Although the STC 20 comes with a simple screw mount that attaches securely to the bottom of



the mic, I'd definitely recommend that you invest in the cradle – and a decent pop shield – because they will keep unwanted noises at bay and allow this mic to really shine. And shine is what it does. **PM**

## SONTRONICS STC-20

**SRP** £135.00

All prices include VAT

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## SHOULD I BUY ONE?

Tempting though it is to write Y-Y-E-E-S-S-I in very large letters across this box, the STC-20 isn't for everyone. For starters you need a preamp or mixer with 48V phantom power (although, it's hard to find one that doesn't these days). Also, this mic is cardioid pickup only, which means that whilst it's great for most recording situations - because it minimises unwanted room acoustics and background noise - it's not quite so useful if you want to four backing singers standing round one mic. If that's what you want to do, you should probably be looking at the more expensive STC-2-X, which is switchable between cardioid and omni. Otherwise, though, we stick by our first answer.