

SE Electronics

SE1A & SE2A

Simon Tillbrook takes the latest offering from the ever-expanding SE line and puts it to work in the studio.

Quality microphones from China? I'm quite willing to admit that I was as sceptical as many others in this business, but it seems that things – as they always do – have changed. Shanghai-based SE Electronics has been gaining quite a reputation for its large diaphragm microphones that are well made and amazing value for money.

Large diaphragm condensers occupy that glamorous end of the scale. They're the pin-up boys of the microphone world and most low-cost manufacturers seem to focus their attention almost exclusively in this area. But as we all know, there's also a need for quality, small diaphragm pencil microphones in all areas of professional audio, and this fact has not been lost on SE Electronics. I was recently provided with a factory stereo pair of SE Electronics SE1A microphones, and a single SE2A.

The SE1A is a simple end-address small diaphragm condenser microphone – an update of the SE1 – with a quieter output and increased sensitivity. The mic has a fixed cardioid polar pattern, an output impedance of 300Ω and a published self-noise level of 17dB (A-weighted). The stereo pairs come with plastic microphone clips, a stereo mounting bar and mic stand thread adapters. The SE2A, just like the SE1A, has a solid metal construction, and the build quality looks and feels good overall. Technical specifications are the same as the SE1A, but the capsule of the SE2A can be swapped to provide a cardioid, hyper-cardioid or omni polar pattern. Along with the interchangeable capsules, the SE2A comes supplied with a full suspension cradle. Both the stereo pair of SE1As and the SE2A are well presented in lacquered wooden boxes with hard foam cut-out inserts.

Both the SE1A and SE2A are of a no-frills design – devoid of any pad or filter features. The provided accessories all have the same solid feel as the microphones themselves. Rather than a simple elastic band, which is what I'd expected to see, the suspension cradle uses a braided elastic arrangement and a neoprene-lined central holder.

An interesting note: After a brief conversation with an American colleague, it was pointed out to me that the cardioid capsule on the SE1A unscrewed and the mounting looked suspiciously like it could accept the SE2A capsules. A quick test proved that this was indeed the case, and so suddenly the flexibility of these mics looks even better.

In the studio

I went into a recent session armed with the SE pencils and a number of other small diaphragm microphones from a variety of manufacturers. First up, I wanted to see how well matched the stereo pair of SE1As was, and for such inexpensive microphones, this aspect was surprisingly good. I used them in both drum overhead and room applications and found them to be well matched, detailed and open. The stereo mounting bar was firm with no rattling or over-the-top microphone stand rumble.

The SE1As appeared to be quite bright sounding in comparison to some of the other options I tried (a quick look at the frequency response chart confirms a slight bump around the 8kHz to 10kHz mark). This brightness was not overbearing, but I did ultimately prefer their tone when used as room or ambient mics rather than close up. There were a few occasions where the mic's tone 'compensated' well for the lack of clarity in some other acoustic instruments: a dull-sounding acoustic guitar was brought back to life, and some very mid-heavy congas were resuscitated by the boost in the upper midrange of the mic.

The characteristics of the cardioid capsule on the SE2A were, as you would expect, very much in line with what I had experienced with the SE1A. There were no distinguishing features that separated it from the sound of its sibling. When fitted with the hyper-cardioid capsule, on axis sound of the SE2A was very similar to the one produced by the cardioid capsule, with a little more low-mid colouration. With the slightest movement off

axis, however, things started to sound a little strange, with holes appearing in the upper and lower mid frequencies. The omni capsule, for me, was the pick of the bunch. It offered a very nice spacious feel, with good consistent pick-up all round. The high-frequency boost was still present, but not as pronounced as the cardioid and hypercardioid options. Getting closer to cymbals and hi-hats gave a pleasing lift to the presence without becoming overly brittle. When compared to the other microphone choices I had available to me, all of which are several times the price of the SE1A and SE2A, they at no point

seemed out of place or significantly inferior. It's fair to say, though, that neither the SE1A nor SE2A are as full ranged as some of the other mics I compared them to. The depth to the sound was not quite up with some, but you always have to keep in mind the price of these SE Electronic microphones.



Sino Language

So a quality microphone from China is a reality. Both of these small diaphragm microphones, the SE1A and SE2A, seem to defy their budget pricing. SE Electronics is developing a very comprehensive and usable range of microphones, and the entire range can be yours for the price of a single high-end, large diaphragm microphone offered by some other microphone manufacturers, which is really quite amazing. Of course, they're not as smooth or sophisticated sounding as some of their significantly more expensive rivals, but at least you won't need to take out a second mortgage to own them. As always, the choice is yours.

Distributed by

• Amber Technology
Phone: (02) 9452 8600
Email: professional@ambertech.com.au
Web: www.ambertech.com.au

Price

• SE1A: \$250; SE1A-ST: \$645 (stereo pair inc. mic clips, stereo mounting bar and wooden storage case)
• SE2A: \$495 (inc. three interchangeable capsules, shockmount and wooden storage case)

