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Oktava MK-219

Large Diaphragm Condenser

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Overview

The Hugely popular MK 219 is a fixed pattern, cardioid microphone featuring a large diaphragm capsule teamed with a low noise discreet preamplifier circuit. Magnetic reed switches are provided for reliable long term durability of both the 10dB pad and the high pass filter.

The capsule employs an extremely thin, gold plated diaphragm and is built to a classic design, enabling the microphone to equal or outperform models many times its price, not only on subjective sound quality but also, in many cases, in terms of sensitivity.

When used for vocals, the large diaphragm capsule adds warmth and enhances high frequency detail while still sounding completely natural. It is strongly recommended that the microphone be used in conjunction with a pop filter when close miking vocals.

The Oktava MK219s high sensitivity means that it can be used on acoustic guitars, pianos and (in stereo matched pairs, available by special order) for ensemble recordings.



Technical specifications

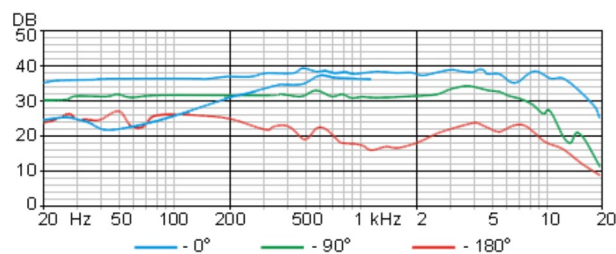
Mic type	Large diaphragm condenser
Polar Pattern	Cardioid
Freq. Response, Hz	20-18000
Output sensitivity, mV/Pa	13
Max SPL, dB for 0,5% THD	122
Self Noise (DIN), dBa	<14
Output impedance, ohm	200
Phase	Positive
Powering, V	48
Supply current, mA	8
Switches	-10dB / High-Pass Filter
Weight, g	340
Length, mm	202
Max diameter/width, mm	48
Temp. Range	-35degrees C to +45 degrees C
Relative Humidity	85% (+25 degrees C)
Accessories included	Mic holder
Accessories optional	Shock mount

A switch located at the left attenuates the sensitivity by 10 dB. This option should be used in high SPL environments or by recording of loud instruments (for example saxophone).

The second switch allows to change the microphone's cutoff frequency. This reduces low frequency interference directly at the input of the microphone amplifier. This setting also compensates for the unavoidable bass boost that occurs with all pressure gradient transducers when they are used at close distance (proximity effect).



Frequency response



Sound On Sound OKTAVA MK219 CAPACITOR MICROPHONE by Paul White

Manufactured in Russia under the auspices of the state plan for 'work creation regardless of demand', the MK219 cardioid microphone is styled with all the panache of an Aeroflot tea trolley -- but plug it in and you hear quite a different story, as PAUL WHITE discovers...

You've probably heard of the USSR's 'Plan', which operated before the breakup of the Soviet Union, under which factories went on mindlessly producing whatever they were told to, even if there was no need for the product. You may have heard stories (perfectly true ones, as it happens) about factories producing thousands of pair of soles for boots, long after the factory that made the boots themselves was closed down and the boots discontinued. If the information supplied by The Mic Company, the MK219's importer, is to be believed, it is against this background of national mismanagement that the mic was produced, ostensibly for use in Soviet broadcast and recording studios. If anyone had bothered to do the sums, they would have realised that even at their sluggish rate of production, enough mics had already been built to ensure that each studio had at least 50. Fortunately, now that the Plan is no more, these mics are available to the outside world at a very attractive price, though current production seems casually paced, to say the least. At the time of writing, the importers are striving to secure a continuous supply. The photograph accompanying this article doesn't do justice to the monumental ugliness of this microphone! An engine casting seems smooth by comparison, and rather than spending any time removing the sharp edges or polishing out the grinder marks, the manufacturers have simply chromed over the whole thing. The casing goes together in two halves, rather like an Easter egg, and the stand adaptor is held in place by a metal ferrule which screws onto the bottom of the mic. Two recessed switches take care of the obligatory 10dB pad and LF rolloff (50Hz) functions. Though these seem extremely crude and produce a thud when operated, they do the job. Moving up to the capsule, things start to get more interesting. Rumour has it that the large diaphragm capsule used is based on an old Neumann design and, having done direct comparisons with my Microtech UM70 (a rather more elegant ex-Eastern bloc mic also purporting to use a Neumann capsule design), I can say that the two mics sounded so similar that in a blind test with vocals, I couldn't tell one from the other. The capsule uses two independent electrodes and two diaphragms, arranged symmetrically; one is gold plated. Other than this, there are no technical details covering the capsule construction. On paper, the capsule doesn't look particularly special. The individual frequency plot provided had no vertical scale calibration so I can only comment on the overall shape of the response curve, which shows a slowly rising characteristic peaking at around 6kHz before slowly falling away again. There is no presence peak as such -- more of a presence mound stretching from 500Hz to 10kHz or so -- but there is a rather nasty little narrow dip at around 3.5kHz which is almost certainly due to acoustic reflections inside the slotted capsule housing. Undoubtedly a more open form of basket construction would have helped cure this, but when it comes to subjective listening tests, this small notch is, for all practical purposes, inaudible. If the quoted response is to be believed, the mic's nominal frequency range extends from 40Hz to 16kHz, but whether this upper limit is as far as the mic goes, I don't know -- the test equipment used to create the plot seems to stop at 15kHz. A polar plot is also supplied, which shows the off-axis response to be comparable with other large-diaphragm mics and certainly useful up to 60 degrees off-axis, or thereabouts. Sneaking a look inside the case revealed an inelegant but functional solid-state preamp mounted on a glass-fibre printed circuit board. This accepts standard 48V phantom powering and produces an overall sensitivity of 100mV/Pa and an equivalent input noise of 14dB. Though there are many microphones offering better noise and sensitivity figures, in the context of close miking this specification is more than satisfactory. With a nominal output impedance of 200 ohms, the mic matches well to virtually any mixer fitted with low-Z, phantom powered, balanced inputs.

SUBJECTIVE TEST

In addition to checking out the MK219 in my own studio, I also obtained a second opinion from our Deputy editor Debbie, who very much liked its combination of warmth and detail. As a vocalist who regularly records, and who tries out most of the mics we get in for review, she's in a good position to put any new mic into context. I too found that with the bass switch out, the mic produced a warm, slightly chesty sound with plenty of detail, yet without the stridency and edge that besets some of the mics that incorporate severe presence peaks. As intimated earlier, the mic was virtually indistinguishable from my Microtech UM70, which appears to use a similar capsule design. This similarity extended to the effect of the bass roll-off switch and to the overall sensitivity though, if anything, the UM70 was just marginally the more sensitive of the two. With the bass roll-off switch turned on, the sound was noticeably thinner, which can be useful when working very close to the microphone or when working with a sound that may need thinning down a little -- acoustic rhythm guitar or backing vocals, for example. But enough of this procrastination. Did I actually like the mic? In short, yes. Nobody buys a large-diaphragm mic to make honest recordings, and this one is no exception, but what I particularly like is that it creates the illusion of honesty while actually flattering the sound quite considerably. Because it doesn't have an obvious presence peak, it's more likely to work with a wide range of singers and, by the same token, it can handle most acoustic instruments extremely well, especially the acoustic guitar.

SUMMARY

You could easily pay twice the asking price of this mic, or even more, and still not improve on the sound -- and you might have to pay even more still to find one that matches its cosmetic ugliness! Though the construction can most politely be described as basic, there's nothing I find immediately worrying as regards the potential reliability of the mic, though without actually ripping it apart and seeing how the capsule's put together, I can't give you any promises. However, at the asking price, I feel inclined to think it's worth taking the risk. Talking of which, I've saved the best news -- which is the price -- until last. You can buy the Oktava MK219 for about the same as the VAT on an established, name-brand studio mic that may not actually sound any better. The RRP is £265, and at the moment The Mic Company are offering a 7-day trial period, after which you can return the mic for a refund if not thoroughly chuffed with it. Having tried it for myself, I don't think many people will want to send their MK219 back -- though singers with a more sensitive disposition may prefer to work with the mic behind a very large pop shield to keep it out of sight!