Sontronics Halo | £129

His mum thinks he's a little angel of course, but ***Trevor Curwen*** never had a Halo until he tried out Sontronics' latest mic

WHAT IS IT?

A dynamic mic for use in front of guitar amps and cabinets

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Captures a nice balance of frequencies
2 Flat design allows unobtrusive placement
3 Cool retro looks

SPECS

Capsule type: Dynamic microphone
Response: 50Hz - 15kHz
Sensitivity: -53dB +/- 1.5dB
Polar pattern: Cardioid
Impedance: ≤600 Ohms
Connector: Three-pin XLR
Weight: 370g

So, how do you mic up a guitar amp's speaker cabinet? There are many ways including using multiple microphones but the tried and tested method that will always get you results is to stick a dynamic mic close-up in front of it.

The most commonly seen mic both onstage and in the studio is Shure's SM57 but there are others that are well suited for the task like the Sennheiser E609 and now Sontronics have come up with the Halo, designed specifically for use on guitar amps and cabinets. The Halo is based on Sontronics' STC-80, a hand-held dynamic vocal microphone and uses the same capsule, albeit enhanced to suit guitar frequencies. The capsule, though, is placed it in a completely different setting to a hand-held mic.

In a design seen previously in Sontronic's Saturn and inspired by 1940s and '50s vocal mics, the capsule is suspended at the centre of a circular frame by four springs, which are intended to keep it isolated from shocks and rumble. The frame is attached to a mount that can pivot through 180 degrees.

Flexibility

We used the Halo to mic up a series of guitar amps both in the studio and at a live gig where it attracted a bevy of admirers who'd never seen anything like it before. The first thing of practical note about the halo is its positioning capabilities – it can be easily placed right up close to speaker grilles, while the pivoting mount is easily adjustable to any position, adding more flexibility in stand placement in tight spaces.

What's more, although use of a stand would usually be the preferred option, the Halo can be 'dangled' on its lead from above like the flat-profiled Sennheiser MD409 and E609 – useful in a stage situation where space is tight and a stand is likely to get knocked.

The mic's stunning looks and practicality wouldn't mean much if it sounded crap though, and fortunately it doesn't. In fact, the Halo yields a great sound in front of a guitar speaker. The idea behind the mic, say Sontronics, is to serve up quality electric guitar sound without having to resort to any EQ and it's been designed with a frequency plot to achieve just that with a low end roll-off below 250Hz, a broad presence boost above 1kHz and a response that starts to tail off rapidly above 7kHz.

The result is a microphone that can accurately capture the sound of a typical guitar cab with plenty of natural bite and presence but no unwanted boom or fizz.

Mic check

In a side-by-side test, miking up a Fender combo, we found that there wasn't an awful lot to choose between the Halo and a Shure SM57, which is saying quite a lot as the latter is an industry standard. Both, to our ears, captured just the right balance of frequencies with slight variations and we'd be happy to use either mic for the job if both were in our collection. That said, the Halo could have some advantages in terms of placement in certain situations.

The bottom line is that if you need to mic up guitar speakers on a regular basis the Halo is a viable alternative to the previous popular choices. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

The Halo is not only a great performer when close miking guitar cabinets, it's also the best-looking.