



**MusicTech**

**RECOMMENDED**



# Sontronics STC-2

Don't confuse the STC-2 with the STC microphone built for the BBC by Standard Telephone and Cable – or the Brauner Valvet, for that matter. Huw Price tests the latest from Sontronics.

#### KEY FEATURES

- Frequency response: 20Hz–20kHz
- Sensitivity: 20mV/Pa -34dB ± 2dB (0dB=1V/Pa 1kHz)
- Polar pattern: cardioid
- Impedance: <=200Ω
- Equivalent noise level: 18dB (A-weighted)
- Max SPL for 0.5% THD @1kHz: 125dB
- Connector: 3-pin XLR

#### MEASURING UP

The STC-2's most obvious competition comes from the low end of the SE Electronics range. It compares favourably with the 2200A (£149) and sounds much more refined than the M-Audio Luna (£149) and the Samson CL7. If you want accuracy, the STC-2 might be a better option than the more expensive SE 3300A.

#### STC-2

Manufacturer **Sontronics**  
 Price **£149**  
 Contact **Sontronics 01202 777956**  
 Web **www.sontronics.com**

**T**he classy outward appearance of the STC-2 gives no clues about its budget status. It feels substantial and the grey satin chrome finish on the low-resonance cast zinc body masks greasy finger prints to maintain those good looks.

The base of the microphone unscrews to reveal some exceptionally neat construction. The preamp looks relatively simple (always a good sign), with two transistors and a transformer output stage. There are even two switches for bass rolloff and an attenuation pad. Both are welcome features that enhance the STC-2's versatility and practicality.

As always, this one-inch Chinese capsule is a gold-sputtered affair based on German designs of the 1920s. The factory has constructed capsules for many leading brands. So, the superb aluminium flightcase, hooped spider shockmount and even the smell have a familiar vibe.

Sontronics has used its lab facilities in Shanghai to tailor the frequency response of the STC-2. The

company assembled a collection of popular microphones and analysed their sonic characteristics. Without slavishly attempting to re-create an 'ideal' set of frequency response curves, the STC-2 represents a deliberate attempt to emulate the best qualities of a select few leading mics.

Sontronics believes that many budget condensers suffer from over-emphasised highs and excessive amounts of EQ-enhanced 'warmth' that mostly clutters up the bass frequencies. We have to say we're in complete agreement, but does the STC-2 rise above the crowd or is it just more of the same?

#### Frequency match

Our first impressions are of a very clean and clear microphone. It's also a competent, refined performer and, as promised, the high frequencies sound particularly smooth and unhyped. The low end is similarly balanced, with no boom or wooliness. Although these are problem areas for many budget condensers, the characteristic many of us find most galling is excessively coloured midrange.

Whether this is a result of questionable capsule construction methods or a misguided attempt to engineer in a little 'character' is a matter for debate. But the main reason why we are so taken with the STC-2 is that the midrange sounds so clear and natural.

Thanks to the strong rear rejection of the cardioid capsule, the sound is very dry and close, but this simply added to the intimacy of the recordings we made with the STC-2. Sonically, it is close to the SE Electronics 2200A, but the STC-2 is a little cleaner and more precise, while the 2200A produces a softer and rounder tone with more flattering colouration. The identically priced M-Audio Luna has a more electronic edge to the upper mids and a comparatively hollow quality.

Switching in the bass rolloff sometimes influences the overall sound, but we experienced no problems. On acoustic guitar, the high-pass filter had very little discernable effect. However, you might not need it, because, like most Chinese condensers, there is comparatively little proximity effect.

The smooth high-frequency response makes the STC-2 particularly suited to vocal recordings. There is plenty of presence, but for once we didn't encounter any sibilance problems. Any vocalist will need to stay on-axis, however, because volume levels drop off quite quickly as you move to the side.

#### The price of luxury

A characterful microphone is a luxury you can afford only if you already have other microphones to choose from. A microphone with a distinctive sound will impart its tone to everything, making it harder to achieve clarity and separation in the mix. If you are planning to buy only one microphone, consider getting something fairly neutral and clean. You'll stand a much better chance of capturing the true timbre of a voice or instrument and you can add a little colour later on using EQ, compression or a plug-in if you need to. The Sontronics STC-2 would be an ideal candidate. **MTM**

#### SUMMARY

##### WHY BUY

- Refined high frequencies
- Tight bass
- Smooth, uncoloured midrange
- Switchable bass rolloff
- 10dB attenuation pad
- Solid flightcase
- Shockmount included
- 3-year warranty

##### WALK ON BY

- Fixed cardioid
- Not particularly flattering
- Suspension mount a bit bulky

#### VERDICT

The STC-2 looks and sounds more expensive than it really is.

