

SE Electronics Ic15

Valve Microphone

A strikingly styled new valve mic offers a sound inspired by vintage classics.

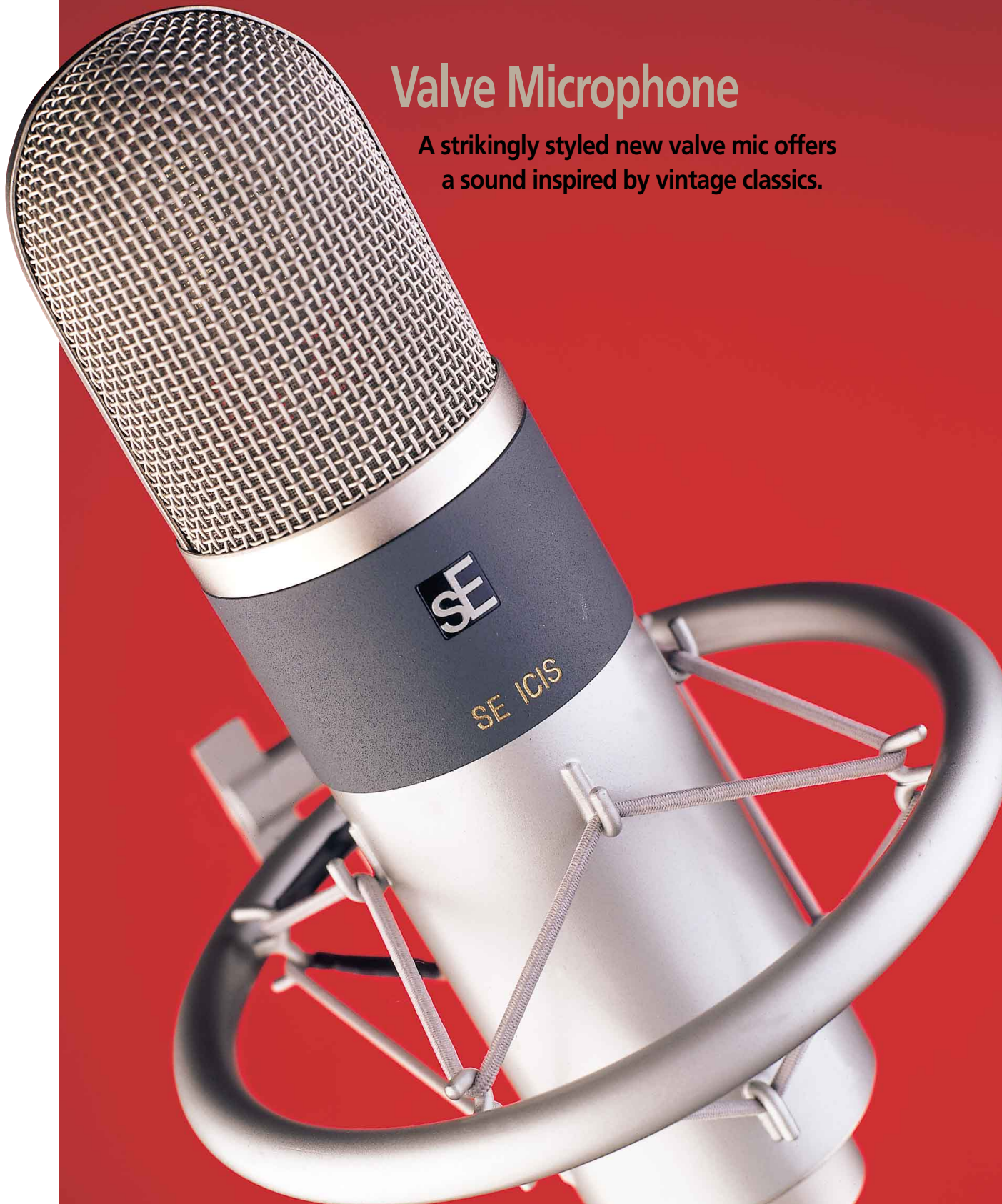


Photo: Mike Cameron

SE Electronics' Icis microphone is one of the company's new range of models and seems to be aimed both at the professional user and the more serious project-studio owner. Although priced above the budget 'me too' market, this cardioid-pattern mic is still very attractively priced in the UK for such a well-specified and solidly engineered tube microphone. It has a distinctive domed grille housing a 1.07-inch capsule featuring a gold-sputtered, edge-terminated diaphragm, and it comes complete with a massively constructed shockmount that reminds me somewhat of the Deep Space Nine space station! This shockmount has a heavy metal sleeve at its core, and the Icis fits neatly into this, secured by a chunky locking ring at the bottom of the mic. You need to fasten the shockmount's swivel nut tightly to prevent drooping, as the combination of mic and shockmount is pretty weighty, but once secure everything seems to stay put.

Also included is the necessary power supply and cable, all contained in a hard camera-style case — the mic has its own hardwood case that fits inside the camera case. The cable attaching to the mic uses an eight-pin locking military-grade connector, while the signal output from the PSU box is a conventional balanced three-pin XLR. There are no pad or filter switches either on the mic or on the PSU, though there is a recessed mains voltage switch to select 230V or 110V operation. Power comes in on a standard IEC mains lead, and there's a mains switch on the PSU. As the mic has its own power supply, it doesn't need phantom power.

Like many classic mics, the tubular casework of the Icic is machined from brass and secured with a threaded end cap, the removal of which allows access to the circuitry. A 12AX7 dual-triode valve is used for the preamp circuit in combination with low-noise Japanese components and high-quality glass-fibre circuit boards, so although the mic is designed to appeal to those who like the sound and the classic styling of retro tube mics, nobody needs to put up with classic noise, high cost, or

The ECC83 valve at the heart of the Icic is socketed for easy replacement.



SOUND ON SOUND

SE Electronics Icic £349

pros

- Sensible cost.
- Comes with shockmount and hard case.
- Warm, articulate sound.

cons

- No pad or LF roll-off switches.

summary

This is a very solidly built and nice-sounding tube microphone that comes without the excessive price tag of the acknowledged studio classics.

poor spares availability. Unlike some so-called tube mics that use the tube mainly for cosmetic purposes, the circuitry here is all-tube, with a transformer-balanced output, and the tube runs with a suitably high anode voltage, which is necessary to allow the tube to perform correctly.

The body of the mic is finished in a new grey matt-finish paint, and though I've experienced finger-marking problems with some earlier SE mics, this new paint seems to have remedied that particular shortcoming. Rather than use screen printing, the SE logo (which denotes the live side of the mic) is embossed, and the model number and company name are engraved through the paintwork into the brass beneath. As expected, the grille is of dual-mesh construction to provide both electrical screening and physical protection for the capsule, and it is finished in satin nickel. In all, the quality of finish is excellent, and the weight of metal used in the construction is impressive! The overall size is 60 x 205mm.

The frequency response of the microphone covers the full audio range of 20Hz-20kHz with a respectable weighted output noise figure of 16dB.

Examination of the response curve reveals a gentle low-end roll-off starting at around 100Hz, augmented by a wide, smooth presence peak rising to around +5dB at 12kHz. Off axis, the mic exhibits a mid-range dip, which imparts a kind of loudness 'smile curve' character to the sound, though in most applications this type of microphone would tend to be used fairly close and on axis.

The sensitivity of the mic is 20mV/Pa and the

maximum SPL for 0.5 percent THD at 1000 Hz is 130dB. These figures are fairly typical for this type of microphone, but the specifications only tell part of the story. What really matters is how the microphone sounds, and large-diaphragm mics like this tend to be built with a sound in mind rather than being designed for absolute accuracy. The manufacturers recommend the microphone for studio vocals, choirs, classical instruments, and wind instruments, though it is also proved itself to be well suited to acoustic-guitar recording, where it turned in a warm, solid sound with plenty of high-end detail.

Session Notes

I checked out the Icic on a studio session where I needed to record voice and acoustic guitar at the same time. The Icic was used as the vocal mic, where it delivered a very natural sound that was simultaneously warm, dense, and articulate, without any of the annoying nasal characteristics that some cardioid mics exhibit. It needs to be used with a good pop shield as, like most large-diaphragm mics, it is prone to popping when it's close-miking vocals, but that's normal behaviour for this kind of microphone. Switching the mic onto acoustic guitar also confirmed that the Icic is a good performer in that area too, and though a large-diaphragm mic may not be the obvious choice for acoustic instruments, the warm and subtly flattering nature of the sound can sometimes be helpful.

In conclusion, I think SE have got this design about right, as it delivers a sound reminiscent of classic mics but without sounding hyped, forced, or aggressive. It manages to combine smoothness with detail and responds well to EQ when needed. Noise was never a problem, though users without a low-cut filter switch on their desk or preamp might miss not having one on the mic. Having said that, if you use a nice mic like this one with a cheapo mixer or preamp that doesn't have the requisite functions, you're probably not going to do it justice anyway. So, if you're in the market for a properly designed tube mic that can deliver the goods and look impressive without costing silly money, you owe it to yourself to add the SE Icic to your list of 'must try' mics. **EOS**

information

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