

Soundelux Elux 251

To paraphrase Shakespeare, some microphones are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. This mic gives **JON THORNTON** an attack of the bards.

FROM THE LONG HISTORY of microphone manufacture, certain models have emerged as true classics. Make no mistake, in a world where digits increasingly rule the roost, vintage microphones are big business, as engineers and producers favour them to restore that elusive 'character' to their recordings.

The long and short of this is that original versions of sought after models such as the AKG C12, Neumann U47 and U49 are now commanding correspondingly great prices as good examples become increasingly rare. Some manufacturers have responded by re-issuing older models, others by attempting to tune modern diaphragms and electronics to mimic that 'vintage' sound. While some of the latter category are undeniably very capable microphones in their own right, purists might argue that this approach is akin to having a fibre-glass bodied replica of a classic sports car – it might look very pretty, but it's still a Ford Sierra underneath.

From California, however, comes a third approach. Soundelux Microphones produces high-quality, professional microphones that aim to recreate as faithfully as possible the sonic character of a range of vintage microphones. This approach means sourcing original components, or manufacturing replacements where necessary, and employing the same fabrication techniques employed in the original designs. The Elux 251 is their take on the fabled ELAM 251, originally manufactured by AKG and distributed under the Telefunken badge.

Opening the beautifully made wooden box, it's clear that it isn't just the sonic character that has been reproduced. The whole look and feel of the microphone is very, very close to the original. Everything screams 'vintage',



enamelled body, to the polar pattern selector switch – even down to the connectors and cable employed to couple the microphone to the equally authentic looking power supply. Initial impressions are of terrific build quality, and superb attention to detail.

The Elux 251 features a 1-inch capsule modelled on the CK12 employed on the original, mated with a 6072 tube – again as featured on the original. Point-to-point wiring is employed on the internals rather than a PCB, and all electronic components are carefully selected to match the specifications and tolerances of the originals. The review model shipped with a spider shockmount, together with the power supply and a rather rugged connecting cable. Plugged in, warmed up, and with an Amek 9098 on preamp duty, it's immediately clear that the Elux doesn't suffer from high levels of noise. Soundelux quotes an equivalent noise figure of 19dB (unweighted), and the 200ohm output impedance drives well into most mic amplifiers.

Having never had the pleasure of using an original 251, and only an all too brief acquaintance with its close relative the C12, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect – and I can't comment on how faithful to the original it sounds. What I can say is that on male or female vocals it sounds absolutely stunning. I try to avoid the temptation when reviewing microphones to start sounding like a wine taster, but on this occasion it's justified. Silky, smooth, rich – all of these adjectives spring immediately to mind.

Trying to be a little more empirical, it's the low-mid warmth that immediately grabs your attention, even when the Elux is a fair distance from source, and without any apparent 'boxiness' to the sound. The high frequency response is gently rising and flattering, but manages to never sound overblown. Clearly, this isn't a microphone that will deliver that very modern up-front sound, with every nuance of breath revealed, but it does do a wonderful job of making vocals sound very textured, particularly when double tracking or layering harmonies.

On the cardioid setting there is a pronounced proximity bump, but again this generally works well and is immediately flattering.

Switching both applications and polar patterns, the Elux was used on its omnidirectional setting to record a nylon strung classical guitar. Here, it proved very capable of bringing out the complexity of the harmonics, delivering a very rounded sound. An AKG C414 used for comparison did bring out a little more high frequency detail, and a little more attack to the sound, but at the expense of making the guitar sound quite thin in comparison.

Leaving aside any comparisons to its forebears, the Elux 251 is a very, very nice microphone – and one that given the money I wouldn't hesitate to add to the collection. It's not exactly cheap, although all things are relative. Compared with an original 251, which can fetch US\$18-20,000 in America, the asking price (UK£3525 inc VAT) is a bargain. But it's not without competition either. So revered is the original Telefunken model in the USA that there are other companies with similar 'tribute' products out there – some of them slightly cheaper too. More significantly, Telefunken USA has recently launched its own reissue of the original, although this is still more than twice as expensive as the Elux 251. So you pay your (not inconsiderable) money, and you make your choice. Compared with the competition, the Elux may not have been born great, but it certainly deserves to achieve greatness. ■

PROS

Sublime, vintage sound; attention to detail, build quality, cheaper than the original.

CONS

Not a cheap microphone; pattern select switch looks potentially as fragile as the original.

EXTRAS

There are 'cheaper' mics in the Soundelux range including the hardly 'entry level' FET models U195 and iFET7. However, of particular note is the sweepable omni to cardioid to fig-8 pattern U99 (UK£2173 inc VAT) and the variable pattern 1950s era Tube 47-style E47 (£2702 inc VAT).



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