

Violet Design Black Knight

Based in Latvia, Violet Design has been involved in microphone manufacturing in a variety of guises for some time and as a brand now seems to have established itself internationally as a purveyor of mics with a distinctive look. **JON THORNTON** tells us if the sound is distinctive too.

A COUPLE OF WEEKS ago, two rather large cardboard boxes arrived containing a bewildering array of Violet microphones along with some equally bewildering constructions of parcel tape and bubble-wrap. Having finally established that the range of microphones went from the very cheapest (£159 inc. VAT) to the most expensive (£3659 inc. VAT), I decided to reverse my usual approach and pick the budget model first on the basis that a microphone manufacturer's efforts in this segment can often tell you more about their values than anything else. And besides, there was a certain curiosity about any microphone that had been given the vaguely Pythonesque appellation the 'Black Knight' (*'It's just a flesh wound.' Ed*).

The latest Violet Design catalogue describes the Black Knight as 'The Bestseller, a perfect alternative to the wide offered Lo-End cheap products'. Not sure I'm any the wiser there, or indeed filled with confidence by that particular piece of copywriting — but I can reveal that it is a fixed pattern cardioid capacitor microphone, featuring a 27mm diameter gold sputtered diaphragm and a solid-state, transformerless output stage. The name, one assumes, comes from the fact that the capsule is contained in a head grille assembly that does look rather like the aforementioned Black Knight's helmet (*'I'll bite your legs off.' Ed*). Not only that, for added comic value (not to mention as an aid for fine-tuning positioning) the whole assembly stands slightly proud of the mic body on an articulated joint, that allows it to tilt up and down and side to side. The whole unit, in case you wondered, is finished in black. It comes in a fetching violet coloured wooden box reminiscent of an old dominos box, and ships with a fixed clip that screws into the base of the microphone.

Plugged in, powered up, and with a male voiceover talent in front of the microphone, my first reaction is to pull the gain

control down several notches. What seems like quite a hot output level is confirmed by the spec — a low-ish output impedance of 50ohms contributes to a sensitivity of 33mV/Pa into a 1k load. Duly attenuated, the male voice sounded reasonably up-front, but just a touch boxy sounding. Moving in closer brought a proximity lift into play, and the boxy quality receded as distance on the mic closed up a little. The Black Knight compared favourably with a

Rode NT1 in this application, although perhaps the Rode had a bit more warmth to the low mids — and both added a definite, though not overly exaggerated presence lift in the 3k area. With sung vocals that boxy quality seemed less pronounced, but the Black Knight seemed a little less smooth and predictable as you increase the distance to the microphone.

Moving to acoustic guitar and that 3k bump really does make its presence felt although again the Black Knight seemed quite sensitive to positioning, which makes the tilting helmet (sorry, capsule) actually quite useful. The microphone catches the sound of picked strings quite well, albeit sounding a little soft in the extreme HF response. It's less convincing with strummed guitar for some reason — there's a slight hardness to the sound and a lack of absolute authority and balance to the low end.

In both cases, with a touch of corrective EQ, the Black Knight really sounds quite pleasant but I'd never really describe it as either neutral or particularly beneficially coloured in its response. What it does do a lot better than most microphones in its price range is react better when the going gets a little louder or shriller. As a single kit overhead it sounded nicely detailed without any hint of high-mid harshness (although given its output level, you do find

yourself wishing for a pad switch at this point). And on female vocals, where a lot of cheaper mics can sound fine up to a particular point and then suddenly become a little scratchy as the SPL rises, the Black Knight retains its composure throughout, if anything sounding a little too soft at times.

All of which sounds a bit mixed, which is probably my overwhelming impression of the Black Knight — mixed feelings. It's a capable microphone with a tonality that has strengths and weaknesses. And for the money being asked (Euro 325), it's really very capable. It may need a little polishing with EQ, but there are no rough edges to the microphone's physical construction here. As an initial point of reference it bodes well for the rest of the range. ■

PROS

Well built, large diaphragm capacitor for very nearly dynamic mic money; smooth HF response even under duress; swivel top quite useful for fine-tuning position.

CONS

Needs a little EQ to sit well with some sources; could really use a pad; some of the documentation has suffered a little in translation.

EXTRAS

You really have to hand it to Violet for the variety and visual impact of its microphone range. Then there are the names. These include The Flamingo, The Stereo Flamingo, The Globe, The Amethyst, The Junior, The Grand Pearl, The Pearl Standard, The Finger and The Black Hole.



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