

# Violet Design Flamingo

The Flamingo sits firmly at the premium end of Violet Design's microphone offerings, and comes in two flavours — Standard and Vintage. Actually, there's a third flavour in the form of the Flamingo Magic Ear, which has a diaphragm shaped like a human ear (no, honestly...) but it's the two more conventional variants **JON THORNTON** is looking at here.

**A**DMITTEDLY, 'CONVENTIONAL' MIGHT not be a word you'd apply to the physical appearance of any Violet product, but the Flamingos are probably among the most restrained in this respect. Styled to reflect a vintage 'bottle' design, both microphones have an identical housing containing the valve-based electronics, topped by a roughly spherical capsule housing. Inside this is a conventional (i.e. circular!) 1-inch dual-diaphragm assembly configured to give a fixed cardioid polar pattern. Unlike some other bottle designs, and indeed some other microphones in the Violet range, the capsule assemblies are not designed to be removable, but are firmly fixed in place.

External build quality seems good, although the knurled plastic ends that sit at either end of the main housing are also firmly fixed despite the fact that they look like they should unscrew. The two variants are easily distinguished by the finish on this housing with the Vintage being finished in a rather understated matt grey, and the Standard in a less understated polished violet. Both ship in a nice wooden box, which contains the microphone, power supply and connecting cable but strangely no shockmount. This comes as an optional extra, which seems a little mean at this end of the market. Particularly so when you see the optional extra, which clamps round the body of the mic with two felt strips tensioned by metal clips — for all the world like two cat collars. It works, but it's certainly not an elegant design.

The microphones internals are based around a 6267 tube, encased in a substantial heat sink and internally shockmounted to reduce the potential effects of valve microphony. The output stage is via a custom-wound humbucking transformer.

Connection to the supplied PSU is via a 7-pin XLR, with a balanced mic level output available on the rear of the PSU.

Switching it on engages a soft-start sequence designed to prolong valve life, which applies the heater voltage and then gently ramps up the plate voltage, and this is indicated on a front panel LCD display.

The output is muted until the sequence is complete, and an LED changes from red to green when all is well. The final stage in the pre-flight check is to remove the three transit screws from the diaphragm assembly that prevent excessive play in the diaphragms internal shockmount during transport.

First up to the plate was the Flamingo Vintage on male vocals, which gave an immediately gutsy result. Used close-up it succeeded in delivering a huge vocal sound from quite a thin voice. A touch of graveliness was apparent in the low frequencies, although even when making maximum use of the sizeable proximity bump, it sounded well controlled. Mid-range frequencies were neutral and detailed, and HF response allowed a little 'air' around the voice without sounding overly bright or brittle. In fact, the HF rolls off quite noticeably but smoothly from around 12kHz, adding to

the slightly dark, smooth character of the sound.

As a result, the Flamingo Vintage rapidly acquired the nickname 'The Barry' (White) from those who used it — it does that sound astonishingly well. The problem is that it's something of a one-trick pony — used close and with certain voices and it's fantastic straight out of the box. But change the voice — particularly with female vocals but some male vocals too — and it starts to sound just a little too voiced, as if there's a bit of a low-mid scoop around the 200Hz area. There is some tweaking to be done with distance in some applications, but the Vintage does seem to be a microphone that is either instantly right or instantly wrong, certainly with vocals.

This 'all or nothing' character was apparent in other applications too. As a single overhead on a stripped down drum kit for a jazz recording it just worked perfectly — plenty of mid range attack and detail, lots of tonal detail from the toms, and a nice smooth sound to the cymbals with no horrible fizziness. But on a none-too-bright sounding steel strung acoustic that lumpiness and sense of a low-mid scoop returned.

Switching to the Flamingo Standard, and the difference in sound, though not quite as dramatic as the shift in body colour, is still very plain to hear. Tuned to sound a little more 'modern', there's a slight mid-range presence boost and a wide peak at around 15kHz. When used in similar applications to the Vintage variant, there's still a real sense of drama and grit in the lower registers, but this doesn't seem to be quite as 'all or nothing' as with the Vintage. On male and female vocals, you don't have to work the microphone quite so close in to get good results, and although the mid-range is slightly harder sounding than the Vintage, it manages to avoid sounding brittle.

The HF peak helps to capture a lot of air and breathiness around vocals, although this might be a touch too bright for some tastes. There's a similarity in sound here to the SE Gemini. The Flamingo isn't quite as in your face as the Gemini can be though, neither does it have that silkiness to the HF that, say, a Horch does. Instead, it sits quite squarely between the two.

Both of these microphones could easily find a place in my mic cupboard — they are well made, extremely quiet for valve designs, and both have that fantastic LF gutsiness when used close in. If I had to pick only one, it would be the Standard rather than the Vintage. When the Vintage worked, it worked extremely well. But in terms of an all-round performer, the Standard seemed to take EQ better, be less fussy in terms of positioning, and seemed to deliver the goods on a wider variety of sources. If big, smooth male vocals are your stock in trade though, you really owe it yourself to demo a 'Barry'... sorry, Flamingo Vintage. ■



**PROS** Well made and quiet; warm and gutsy on vocals when used close in; nicely detailed and solid mid-range.

**CONS** Vintage very variable with different voices; shockmount a little clunky and not included.

**Contact**

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