

Violet Design Globe Vintage & Amethyst Standard Large-Diaphragm Cardioid Mics

November/December 2007

TapeOp

Violet Design is a relatively new boutique microphone manufacturer founded by Juris Zarins, original manufacturer of the BLUE mic line. Violet's microphones are all hand made and produced exclusively in their Latvian factory (check out the virtual factory tour on their website!). FDW-Worldwide, Violet's US distributor, sent along a couple of their most popular mics for us to check out, the Globe and the Amethyst. If you'd like a quick summary of my review, here it is: Wow.

The Globe is a relatively compact cardioid unidirectional mic which comes from Violet in one of two flavors, Standard or Vintage. Our review model was a Vintage which features a dual-diaphragm capsule encased in a perfectly spherical head of shiny brass mesh. Below the head assembly sits the body of the mic, which has a squat, saucer-like appearance. The mic comes nestled in a nice, heavy, cherry-wood case lined with a cushy velveteen material and is supplied with a small, efficient shockmount featuring three purple gel cushions suspending the mic in a sturdy frame. Now, this description might lead one to imagine a somewhat cheesy, modern design, but the Globe's appearance is actually very "vintage". You might even say it's German-looking. Or something like that.

My first application for the Globe was as a vocal mic for Dustin Aaron, a singer/songwriter in the band The Foreign Cinema. Dustin's got a warm, clear, conversational voice somewhere in the higher tenor range, and the Globe seemed



VIOLET GLOBE VINTAGE

like a good fit. I ran the Globe into a Universal Audio LA 610 via all-Mogami cabling, applied a little bit of compression and no EQ, and was instantly pleased with the vocal in the mix. The Globe's specs show it flat almost down to 35 Hz, with a gentle slope centered around 3 kHz—but with no excessive tailoring—and that's what I heard. A dead-accurate and detailed sound, deep yet present—kinda that "right on the speaker" quality without the hyped 5 kHz spike of some modern designs. So far, so good! We tried a number of singing postures, but found that the mic responded best in this capacity with the vocalist about 2–3" away, spot on center of the head. Although Violet states that the brass mesh head is designed to reduce plosives, I still used a trusty nylon popper stopper, mostly out of habit.

In the following weeks, I used the Globe on a variety of sound sources, including acoustic guitar, djembe, female vocals, small pedal-steel amps, and our lovely 110-year old Knabe upright grand. I gotta say that the Globe was phenomenal all the way around the sound spectrum. In almost all of these applications, it had a satisfying, airy quality with very little coloration. Acoustic instruments and vocals in particular had an almost unnerving "reality" to them coming out of the speakers. While it sounded great in front of an amp (and can handle high SPLs!), my personal preferences lean towards smaller diaphragms or ribbons when mic'ing most amps. I also noted that

the Globe was possibly one of the quietest mics I've ever had in my studio, even when paired with the preamps in an Mbox 2 (which I consider generally kinda noisy). In addition to the included shockmount, the Globe has two separate internal shockmounts for the capsule and electronics, which seem to help cut down on rumble. Note that the mic's preamp is a proprietary transformerless design, which probably has just as much to do with the mic's low self-noise.

The Amethyst also comes in either Standard or Vintage flavors; our review model was a Standard, which Violet describes as having a more "modern" EQ curve. The mic also shipped with the optional shockmount, which, given the unusual and boxy shape of the mic body, is really a necessity. While the mic can be directly mounted to a stand, in all but the quietest scenarios, I found myself reaching for the shockmount. Just like the Globe, the Amethyst ships in a plush, dark-purple box and has a handsome, sturdy look with a deep-red finish. Larger than the Globe, the Amethyst has some heft to it and resembles a squared-off vintage bottle mic.

In contrast to the Globe, the Amethyst has a slightly more aggressive top end, with fast transient response, high output, and a soft low-end bump around 60-70 Hz. It's unidirectional cardioid as well; no switchable patterns here, folks—just solid engineering and classic function. Much like the Globe, I found the Amethyst to be versatile and exceptional on just about anything we stuck it in front of. As I mentioned above, I don't generally prefer large-diaphragm mics in front of guitar amps, but the Amethyst challenged that stance when we placed it in front of our deadly Silvertone Twin Twelve / Gibson Melody Maker combo. It sounded amazing! We placed the mic 2" away from the grill, midway between the center of the cone and the outer edge. I always feel a little ginger when mic'ing guitar amps with expensive large-diaphragm mics, but I put my

faith in Violets' stated spec of 134 dBA max SPL. The Amethyst seemed nearly impossible to overload, and although some proximity effect was present, shelving just a little low end helped the guitar cut straight through a rather dense mix.

I also had the opportunity to use the Amethyst as a drum overhead for the country band Rowdy Kate. Used as the mid mic in an M/S configuration with a Royer R 121, I was really pleased with the detail and attack of the drums. I usually find myself turning the overhead drum mics way down in a mix, but this really was the direct opposite. In fact, the Amethyst as an overhead mic offered a much more natural and consistent sound than I find myself normally capturing—certainly wider and clearer than my normal configuration of X/Y pencil condensers.

It would be difficult to choose between these two mics; if pressed, the only deciding factor for me would be my wallet. The Globe is certainly worth every penny of its \$1500 street price, and the Amethyst streets for around \$900, which seems like a great deal to me; these are classic designs which can compete with anything in the \$1000+ mic market.

For me, it's always nice when things just work in the studio. But when things just work really, really well, that's when you know you're onto something that helps to elevate your abilities. That's what gear should do, and that's definitely what these killer mics do. (Globe Vintage \$1799 MSRP, Amethyst Standard \$1079; www.violetusa.com)

– Dana Gumbiner
www.stationtostationrecording.com



VIOLET AMETHYST STANDARD

