



Shure PG42 USB

Shure launches a USB microphone based on its highly acclaimed PG42. **Huw Price** crosses the digital divide.

KEY FEATURES

- USB plug-and-play connectivity
- Integrated preamp with mic gain control
- Zero-latency monitoring
- Onboard 3.5mm headphone jack
- Monitor mix control
- 16-bit, 48kHz recording
- Compatible with Windows Vista, XP, 2000 and Mac OSX

MEASURING UP

SE Electronics really upped the ante with the USB2200a (£293). Like the PG42 USB it's based on an established analogue mic, but the USB2200a also gives you an analogue output option. So far, the USB2200a is the only USB mic we've tried that's in the same league as the PG42 USB, but we were very taken with the MicPortPro (£161) – a plug-in device that turns any microphone into a USB one, complete with adjustable mic gain and headphone monitoring.

PG42 USB

Manufacturer **Shure**

Price **£311**

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Anyone who's ever been in a studio or on a stage will almost certainly have played or sung into a Shure mic at some point – the SM57 and SM58 being particularly widely used. In recent years the microphone giant has branched into producing USB models, which are ever more popular as laptop-based music setups become more common.

The PG42 USB is a large-diaphragm side-address condenser microphone with a 1.1-inch gold-sputtered Mylar diaphragm. We connected the USB cable to a spare socket on a Mac G4 laptop, clicked the Sound icon in System Preferences and Shure Digital was already there on the input/output menus. Duly selected, we booted up Logic Audio, selected Shure Digital again in Audio Hardware & Drivers and after a quick relaunch were up and running. No glitches, no conflicts and no hassle. Reading through the manual, the procedure for PCs seems just as simple.

Shure has kept the tonal signature fairly neutral, which is what you'd want from a general-purpose microphone. At a distance of a metre or so from an acoustic guitar the sound was detailed and clear without seeming overly bright.

The PG42 USB doesn't display a huge amount of proximity effect, but there is enough to fill out the low mids as you move it closer to a sound source.

Vocal tests revealed a solid and well defined response with no obvious colouration. The PG42 USB is slightly

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susceptible to plosives, so it's a shame that there's no windshield included in the package, but Shure does throw in a 3m (9.8ft) USB cable, a shockmount and a carrying case. Off-axis the PG42 USB maintains an impressively even frequency response; rear rejection is very effective across the whole of the frequency range.

Teething troubles

Our only gripe concerns the onboard monitoring, which we found very hissy. It's rather odd, because the recordings we made were absolutely pristine when we played them back through our usual MOTU 828 MkII interface. However, we experienced this only with Logic Express 9, Logic 6.0.1 and GarageBand 1.0.1. After a couple of restarts the issue with Logic Express 9 cleared up and everything ran cleanly thereafter; the monitor path was also as clean as a whistle with Cubase running on a MacBook with Mac OSX 10.6.2.

So, although the PG42 USB proved it can work flawlessly, it might not be compatible with your system. As always, you should check with the manufacturer before purchasing. However, there should be no OS issues because the PG42 USB is quoted as being compatible with Windows Vista, XP and 2000 plus Mac OSX 10.1 or later.

Some manufacturers seem to regard USB microphones as the poor relation – and that's often reflected in the build quality (and, to be fair, the price). Unfortunately, the sound tends to follow suit, with that trebly cheap-condenser tone, low sensitivity and high noise floor.

With the PG42 USB, Shure has gone in completely the opposite direction. Its USB model is based on one of its well-regarded analogue mics and packaged with high-quality accessories. The build quality is also beyond reproach. You get all the switching features you'd expect on a regular recording condenser, plus hands-on control of mic gain, overall monitoring level and monitor balance. It's also sensitive enough to be used for distance mic'ing as well as close-mic'ing, so you're not expected to compromise on tone quality.

In fact, we preferred the PG42 USB to several all-analogue competitors at around the same price. So when

inspiration strikes, the PG42 USB will let you nail that take wherever you happen to be and you won't have to worry about recapturing that vibe with a 'proper' microphone somewhere further down the line. And isn't that what USB mics are supposed to be about? **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Very portable
- Great build quality
- Superior sound
- Easy to use

WALK ON BY

- Possible noisy monitoring
- No analogue output option

VERDICT

Offers superior sound and build for a USB microphone, but check for software compatibility before you buy.

