

## **BEEFED-UP OUTPUT GAIN AND IMPEDANCE MATCHING**

What's better than a stereo ribbon microphone? In the case of the new Royer SF-24, the answer is a stereo ribbon microphone with plenty of output gain and worry-free impedance matching. The SF-24 incorporates all the best that Royer's stereo SF-12 ribbon mic offered, plus a proprietary electronic system comprising Royer-designed toroidal transformers and electronic buffering stages.

Royer's active system provides enough added output gain so that the user need not worry as much about marrying the mic to the perfect preamp. Also, the electronic system makes the need for perfect impedance matching between the mic and the preamp input stage a non-issue. I ran the mic through a number of mic preamps from low-end Focusrites up to SSL and Neve board preamps with great results.

### **Sturdy and Easy-to-Use**

My first impression of the SF-24 was that it is well made. When I opened the handsome outer suitcase, which houses the mic (impressively locked in its own case-within-a-case), cable, shock-mount and literature, it was obvious you get what you pay for (as well you should for \$3,800). The mic is heavy and all seams and fittings are top-notch: This is a precision instrument. The elements are each placed precisely at 45 degrees from center and 90 degrees from each other, with the Royer logo dead-center.

The shock-mount allows for instant and accurate placement of the mic and is one of the best and worst parts of the SF-24 (more later). The mic slides tightly into the mount with the logo fitting into a specifically designed indent—there is no question what is on- and off-axis. It provides excellent mechanical isolation and is small enough to let you fit the mic into tight places.

### **Versatile Studio Tool**

In the studio, I used the mic on a wide variety of instruments. Of course, the mic must have phantom power applied for it to operate. Once you get past the fear of pushing the 48-volt button knowing that there's a ribbon at the other end, the rest is cake. The shock-mount makes it a breeze to put the mic in X/Y in front of virtually anything and get a great result. For the first test,

I used the mic above a drum kit. The SF-24 provided a perfect stereo picture of the drums and offered the signature roundness on the transients for which ribbons are notorious. On another session, the mic was set up in a knee-high position in front of the kit with equally good results. The SF-24 especially shined when used to capture occasionally troublesome instruments, such as soprano sax and steel drum. In the case of the sax, the mic was placed vertically halfway down the sax, aimed at the keys. The resulting sound was warm, smooth and sat in the track so nicely that it sounded “finished,” even without fader moves or compression. The steel drum can be a nasty, edgy instrument that seemingly jumps in and out of the track at will. The ribbon’s rounded transients and trimmed top end gave the instrument just the treatment it needed to be present without being annoying.

One of the most interesting sounds came from using the Royer close up on a guitar amp that was used for re-amping a guitar. The amp was placed in a medium-sized iso booth and set up using a tremolo setting through a single 12-inch speaker. Because of the placement and room size, the SF-24 provided an interesting stereo picture of the amp that wasn’t present in the room itself—a happy accident that “made” the track.

The SF-24 was also used on bongos, the speaker of a Wurlitzer piano, a marimba and for recording a small orchestral ensemble, all with excellent results.

The Royer shined when used on an ensemble consisting of three trombones, french horn, tuba, two soprano saxophones and a trumpet. The mic was placed close to the group in front of where the conductor would stand. The room had a 16-foot ceiling and concrete floor and was moderately live. The mic rendered a nice stereo picture and went toe to toe with a Decca tree consisting of three Neumann U-87s.

The mic was also used as an M/S pair on a trumpet recording and as a drum overhead. The trumpet sounded remarkable when the mid mic was isolated. When decoded through an M/S matrix, it allowed for easy mixing of the room into the final product. M/S pairs can be a pain to set up when using two separate stands and mics, and while you think the Royer would be the exception, it is not. The shock-mount, while brilliant for X/Y applications, is clunky for M/S use. It is not at all easy to jump from X/Y to M/S, and I found myself having to go through unorthodox mic stand acrobatics to get the SF-24 into the proper orientation. This is one of the coolest uses of this product, but, frankly, the mount makes it difficult.

### **Blue Ribbon Results**

Apart from my issues with the mount when used in an M/S array, I can’t say enough good things

about the SF-24. As with all mics, the SF-24 is not the magic transducer for all scenarios, but the Royer sounded so good in so many situations and was so easy to use, I would have to say that it was one of the most versatile mics I've ever used. The SF-24 came through with flying colors on almost every situation thrown in its direction—a rarity, indeed. For any seeker of scintillating sound, the SF-24 is a true find.

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