

R-121 Ribbon Microphone

By Stephen Patt

We all have had at one time or another a home studio, some more professional than others. My various incarnations have had analog decks, either reel-to-reel or cassette type, with varying degrees of outboard signal processing gear. We thought it best to avoid the analog versus digital war, but wanted to address the biggest investments in any working home studio: the one good microphone that can make-or-break the sound of a vocal track or acoustic guitar, and the most common of signal processors, a mike preamp with added features of eq and compression.

The market is incredibly rich right now in the mike field (limiting our range to \$1500 and under seemed somewhat arbitrary but reasonable), and we looked at tube microphones (including Neumann, AKG, and AT offerings), high end dynamics (from Sennheiser and Shure), and finally settled on ribbon products. Once thought to be too fragile for live use, ribbon mikes initially came into popularity in the 1930s, and are still highly prized by collectors and connoisseurs. The Royer R-121 Ribbon Velocity Microphone delivered amazing accuracy of reproduction, withstood terrific abuse (both sonic and mechanical), and was useful in a wide variety of situations, from close miking vocals and acoustic guitars (in our case, the fabulous Collings Jumbo) to use on a 60 watt GT amp with a Les Paul cranked, with complete transparency and warmth - all the advantages of tube, with more flexibility and durability. Additionally, we used a pair of matched Royers to image a jazz quartet, consisting of upright bass, guitar, drums, and acoustic piano - terrific accuracy and balance, with firm bass, clear mids, and breathy highs. Just great.

Physically, the R-121 Ribbon is a spacey-looking long cylinder, simple but lovely in design - a side address, bidirectional mike, which is used off-axis in close-miking, and has no signal rejection in a horizontal plane, making it perfect for either large groups (a trio of backup singers) or a single Marshall blasting away - volumes that can kill a sensitive tube condenser. No power supply is needed, and the wooden jewel box and instruction book that accompany the mike give helpful protection and background on the applications for this utility player, making it a bargain for any large or small studio.

The list on these babies is a bit pricey, just under our ceiling of \$1500, but their versatility is unmatched. Another plus from Royer, in addition to their formidable microphones, is their innovative PS-100 Metal Pop Screen Filter, which uses a patented metal screen more effective at limiting pops than fabric devices. Sound passage is more intact, with no high frequency loss, and best of all, it can be cleaned without damage to the filter itself!

Excellent!