

ROYER R-122 MKII ACTIVE RIBBON MIC



BY RUSS LONG

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While active ribbon microphones are commonplace in the industry today, they were unheard of before Royer released the R-122, the world's first active ribbon mic, back in 2002. I bought a pair then and continue to be a faithful user. Their active design combines impedance-matching circuitry with condenser-like output levels, allowing the mic to be paired with virtually any preamplifier, as the preamp impedance is no longer a major factor. It also allows the mic to be effectively used on extremely quiet sound sources.

The R-122 MKII has a beautiful brushed-nickel finish and like the other mics in the Royer family, it slips into a protective sock and packs in a beautiful wood box for storage. The mkII looks, sounds and performs exactly like the R-122 except for the addition of two recessed switches on the rear of the mic. The first activates a -15 dB pad and the second, a bass-cut. When switched to Off, the switches are completely out of the circuit and the microphone functions as an original R-122.

The pad is positioned before the

The R-122 MKII gains two recessed switches— a -15 dB pad and a bass-cut.

microphone's electronics, so when it's activated, it eliminates any potential for headroom-related distortion, even on extremely loud sound sources. As a point of reference, when the pad is engaged, the mic's output is 2 dB lower than Royer's R-121. The pad offers no noticeable coloration, so activating the pad and turning up the mic pre 15 dB results in an identical sound.

The bass-cut circuit trims 6 dB per octave beginning at 100 Hz. This extremely musical filter is designed to effectively eliminate the proximity effect-induced bass buildup. My initial feeling was that this is a good feature that I would only use a small fraction of the time, but I've found that I actually spend more time recording with the bass-cut activated than not.

The electronics in the R-122 MKII are wired by hand in Royer's Burbank, CA factory. The mic's design incorporates a fully balanced, discrete head amplifier system that utilizes ultra-low noise FETs and a specially wound custom, Royer-designed toroidal transformer that Royer claims will provide a faster

transient response time than provided by traditional ribbon mics. The quiet design increases the mic's sensitivity to an impressive 37 dB. This higher sensitivity doesn't result in any additional self-noise as the phantom-powered circuitry is only providing impedance conversion.

On a recent tracking session, I used a pair of R-122 MKIIs as drum overheads and they worked wonderfully. The pair of ribbons captured the rich tone of the cymbals with all of the top-end sparkle without ever sounding harsh or brittle. On another session, the mic did an exceptional job capturing hi-hat, shaker and tambourine. Royer R Series mics have always been the bomb recording electric guitar and the R-122 MKII is the new staple. Where the R-122 had too much gain to work with some mic pres, the pad makes the R-122 MKII the most versatile Royer ever. I had great results capturing a blazing loud guitar through a Marshall 4x12 cabinet with the R-122 MKII into a Retro OP-6 mic pre. The exact same chain (but this time with

the pad turned off) worked to record lightly strummed mandolin.

As with other Royer microphones, I had great results using the R-122 MKII to record acoustic guitar. I used a pair of the mics (one on the neck and one on the body) to record a Taylor 514CE through a pair of Gordon mic pres and it sounded wonderful. I also had respectable results using a R-122 MKII on the body and a Blue Hummingbird on the neck of a Martin guitar (again through the Gordon mic pres). The microphones also did an admirable job recording violin, viola and cello.

It's important to note that due to Royer's offset ribbon transducer, the back of the R-122 MKII (also true of the R-121, R-122 and R-122V) is slightly brighter than the front side at distances of three feet or less. I've found that I have better results using the backside of the mic when recording vocals, acoustic guitars and piano.

While this wasn't true two decades ago, there are a lot of ribbon mic options made by multiple manufacturers out there today and a lot of them are really great, but most of them excel in only one area. Not so with the R-122 MKII. This is possibly the most versatile microphone I've ever encountered. If you can only own one ribbon mic, I say it's got to be the R-122 MKII.

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