

Shure, Audio-Technica Ribbon Mics: Silky Smooth with Technological Edge

Digital recording is the standard in today's world, and with all its advantages, the results can often feel sterile and thin, lacking the warmth of analog tape. This has driven the need for products such as ribbon microphones that produce smooth, lush tones that complement the hard-edged digital process. Addressing a growing trend, both Shure and Audio-Technica each have released two new ribbon microphone models that combine these highly desirable sonic characteristics with that latest technology.

Shure has been producing microphones for more than 80 years, and they have become a standard in the live sound and broadcast fields. With the offering of their KSM condenser models, Shure introduced an affordable yet quality line of mics suitable for both stage and studio. Expanding the KSM series with ribbon offerings was a logical step for the company. According to product manager Chad Wiggins, "The digital recording trend has led to the need for microphones that add warmth and color to the process." Shure has actually had ribbon designs on their drawing board for years but were highly impressed with the el Diablo and Naked Eye microphones from Crowley and Tripp that had been gaining popularity among recording engineers. Shure acquired the products and released them as the KSM353 and KSM313.

With the exception of the logo, Shure did



A-T 4080 and 4081



Shure KSM353 and KSM313

not alter the design of the mics at all. These are beautiful microphones, both sonically and structurally, and come packaged in classy mahogany boxes. The KSM353 has a MSRP of \$3,320 and is a bi-directional ribbon, producing the same sound from the front or back of the mic. The KSM313, with an MSRP of \$1,619, is the dual voice design and produces two very different results from either the front or back, actually like having two mics in one. Shure's Roswelite technology provides a distinct advantage over traditional ribbons in that the KSMs are extremely durable and produce a much higher output, eliminating the need for special preamps and making them suitable for live applications.

Audio-Technica has also noticed the emerging ribbon microphone market and has answered the call with the company's first-ever ribbon models, the 4080 and 4081. Like Shure, Audio-Technica uses a proprietary imprinting process, allowing for a thinner ribbon while maintaining strength and minimizing distortion. The added durability also

makes the Audio-Technica mics suitable for live situations.

These are gorgeous mics. Although the 4080 and 4081 use similar core ribbons and are both bi-directional, they have radically different body styles. The 4080's design is similar to a standard large condenser mic and has an MSRP of \$1,245, while the 4081 utilizes a small "pencil" design with an MSRP of \$895. Both models require 48 volts phantom power, which is unusual for a ribbon but offers the advantage of higher output levels.

I tested all four microphones on a variety of sources including vocals and several fretted instruments. Although each had its own unique character, all delivered the rich, smooth silky sound that ribbons are known for, but also produced a clear top end. I found that placement and proximity had radical effects on the tone and allowed me to achieve a range of desirable colors. —Keith Baumann

» Ordering info: shure.com

» Ordering info: audio-technica.com

Evans EC2 SST Drumheads: Controlled Resonance

Evans has introduced the EC2 SST (Sound Shaping Technology) series of drumheads, which deliver a clear attack coupled with a warm, dense and focused sound. A good tuning range and controlled resonance are also great features.

The EC2 SST drumheads feature two-ply construction with an overtone-reducing "Edge Control" ring painted underneath. The rings are designed to pinpoint overtone and ringing tendencies for specific sizes of drums. The width and thickness of the ring slightly changes depending on the drum's size, as opposed to one specific ring design for all sizes of heads. The Edge Control rings are not meant to dampen overtones completely, but rather reduce overtones to give the drums a more natural, open sound.

The heads that I was sent for review went on a kit that has a standard eight-ply maple/45

degree bearing edge shell design. The EC2s tuned up very quickly, and I was pleasantly surprised at how they immediately fattened up the sound of the drums, no doubt because of the two-ply construction. The tone of the drums was much more present without sacrificing the clarity of the attack. Evans claims these heads to have a fairly wide tuning range, but they really shine at low to medium tunings. You're not going to be able to crank them up high because they have a tendency to choke.

The EC2s are in their element with no muffling at all. Just for fun, I did a comparison of the heads with and without external muffling. The character and performance of the heads didn't suffer one bit with some external muffling. They still had a nice full sound with plenty of attack.

Evans has done a great job creating a head



that balances a full, warm tone with good attack and a fairly wide tuning range. The SSTs do a good job of pinpointing and eliminating some of the overtones on toms without sacrificing tone quality. If you prefer lots of dampening, don't expect the Edge Control rings to be a magic fix. If you prefer your toms more open with minimal to medium dampening, these are the heads for you.

—Ryan Bennett

» Ordering info: evansdrums.com