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Shure KSM44

Multi-pattern Capacitor Microphone

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Published in SOS March 2001
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Paul White tests a new capacitor mic from Shure which offers a choice of three polar patterns.

Shure's KSM44 is an impeccably engineered multi-pattern capacitor microphone intended for a number of studio applications including vocal recording, though its extended low-frequency response also makes it suitable for the accurate pickup of low-frequency instruments, such as electric bass and kick drum. It comes in an aluminium flightcase complete with a really solid, nicely finished shockmount in a similar metallic 'champagne' finish to that of the mic itself. There's also a conventional mic stand adaptor in the kit as well as a soft protective pouch for the mic.



On The Bench

Recessed toggle switches on the mic's body access a 15dB pad, a bass roll-off filter and the three available polar patterns (omni, cardioid and figure-of-eight). The filter has three modes of operation: 6dB/octave cut below 115Hz, 18dB/octave cut below 80Hz, or bypass. Inside the three-layer mesh basket is a dual-diaphragm, large-diameter capsule that uses a pair of low-mass, gold-layered mylar membranes which are around one inch in diameter and only 2.5 microns thick. The capsule is shock mounted to help reduce stand-borne noise.

The capsule feeds into a transformerless, Class A preamp which features a very fast transient response and no crossover distortion. A full 48V phantom power supply is recommended, but the KSM44 will run at phantom voltages down to 11 Volts with reduced sensitivity and headroom.

Looking at the specs for a moment, the frequency-response graph shows that the mic has a 20Hz-to-20kHz response where the high-frequency sensitivity falls by around 6dB at 20kHz. Without the LF filters in, the low end remains essentially flat unless the mic is used close up, in which case the proximity effect introduces up to about 5dB of bass lift over a broad area centred at about 50Hz. The shape of the top of the frequency curve changes slightly depending on what polar pattern is selected, but there's always a presence peak of about 4 to 5dB -- nominally centred at 5 to 6kHz but shifting up to around 12kHz in omni mode.

The sensitivity of the mic also varies with the polar pattern: -31dBV/Pa in cardioid mode, -36dBV/Pa in figure-of-eight mode and -37dBV/Pa in omni mode. Self noise is a creditably low 7 to 10dB, again varying with the pattern selected and the maximum SPL is between 127dB and 131dB without the

SHURE KSM44
£881

pros

- Excellent build quality.
- Good bass extension and transient definition.
- Good range of included

Friday 24th April 2009

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attenuator switched in. This translates to a dynamic range of 125dB or more with a signal-to-noise ratio of between 84 and 87dB.

In The Studio

Numbers can only tell you so much -- the only way to find out how a microphone really behaves is to record with it. I used it for a vocal overdub session and found the KSM44 to be nicely neutral sounding, while at the same time offering gentle support to the vocal part. It certainly doesn't have an over-hyped 'large-diaphragm' sound but, on the other hand, it's definitely no lightweight -- the low-end response is really quite impressive. Even in cardioid mode, the mic manages to avoid sounding at all nasal, though the omni pattern is just a hint more open-sounding. For vocal use, the low-cut filter is recommended, and a pop shield is essential, though the elastic shockmount keeps out a surprising degree of mechanically transmitted low-frequency noise.

As an instrument mic, the KSM44 produces very natural results with clear, detailed highs and plenty of bass extension. The tonality is fairly consistent between patterns but there is audible switching noise if the mic patterns are changed while the phantom power is on. Transient sounds are captured with superb articulation, making the KSM44 a good choice for general percussion miking, drum overheads, plucked instruments, acoustic guitar and piano.

Summary

The KSM44 is not unduly expensive for a multi-pattern mic, yet its build quality and performance stack up well against the big-name European mics. To be fair, most good mics perform well in a general-purpose context but, because of its bass extension, the KSM44 makes its mark by performing particularly well with bass instruments. As a vocal mic, it doesn't add any obvious coloration, so if you're after an overtly flattering mic then perhaps this isn't the best model for you, even though it does thicken and support the sound in a very gentle way. On the other hand, its subjective neutrality means it will sound good with many different vocalists, which is a serious consideration if you run a commercial recording facility. In any event, the KSM44 is a very real demonstration that there's more to Shure than the ubiquitous SM58! **SOS**

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Good range of included accessories.

cons

▣ May not be overtly flattering enough for some users.

summary

A natural-sounding microphone that can turn its hand to just about anything. Its strong points are its high-end detail and extended bass response.



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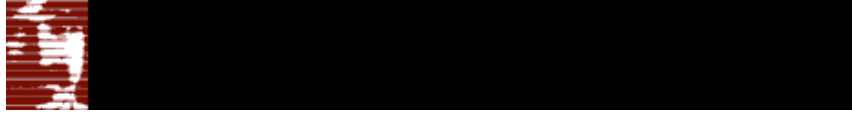
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Email: [Contact SOS](#) | Telephone: +44 (0)1954 789888 | Fax: +44 (0)1954 789895

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