

# Royer R-101

Another ribbon from the brand that has done more than most to repopularise the type is always an interesting proposition. It's also a more affordable one. **JON THORNTON**

There's no doubt that Royer Labs was one of the most instrumental in kick-starting the ribbon renaissance. With the introduction of the R-121 in 1998, it helped to open the eyes and ears of a new generation of sound engineers. In essence, what it did seems obvious in retrospect. Royer engineered a microphone that displayed all of the most admired characteristics of a ribbon design while at the same time minimising their often quoted susceptibility to damage. As a result, many more of us were prepared to take that initial leap of faith not just in the purchase, but also in using them in a variety of applications.

Fast forward nearly 15 years and there's never been a wider choice of new ribbon designs. From faithful recreations of vintage designs, to new approaches featuring clever electronics or acoustic structures, there's a ribbon design out there at pretty much every price point. Perhaps because of this, Royer has added to its range with the R-101, which as the name sort of implies, is a back to basics model.

Far from being a diminutive version of the R-121 though, the 101 is actually much chunkier than its stablemate, with a wide tubular body that incorporates a series of slots front and rear for the grille assembly. It's nearly twice as heavy too so you'll be appreciative of the sturdy elastic suspension mount that ships with it. All of that extra weight and girth gives the feeling of a microphone that will do the best it can to protect the delicate ribbon element inside and in fact this is backed by some internal design features including a multi-layered windscreen, and a degree of shock-mounting of the ribbon assembly itself.

In keeping with the back to basics approach, the R101 is entirely passive in design, with only an output transformer between ribbon motor and output. As you can imagine this doesn't result in a terrifically high sensitivity figure, which if my maths is correct is in the 4mV/Pa ball park. Internally, it uses the same offset-ribbon transducer approach as the other R-Series microphones. By moving the 2.5 micron ribbon element forward from the centre of the flux-frame, Royer claims a better SPL handling from the front (logo) side, and a lightly brighter response for close miked sources at the rear. In practice this brighter response is subtle, but noticeable



especially on sources such as voice and strings.

As I don't possess an R-121, the R-101 instead went head to head with its active sibling the R-122. Maybe not a completely fair fight but with a UK list price (£599 + VAT) of less than half the R-122, I thought it would be interesting to see what the extra buys you. Aside from the obvious and very apparent difference in gain required for each, initial impressions with spoken voice at a moderate distance (6-inches) would suggest 'not a lot'. Both sound flattering and free of any obvious harshness or brittleness, with reasonable weight in the low-mids and a treble tonality which, while not exactly sparkling, is at least devoid of any exaggerated sibilance. Pop shields at the ready, and moving in that little bit closer for spoken and sung vocals and some differences become more apparent. The 101 doesn't have the same degree of proximity effect build-up that the 122 does, and curiously seems to sound that little bit more 'roomy'.

Moving to a drum kit, with a pair of R-101s versus a pair of R-122s (spaced pairs, arranged about 2ft apart and 3ft above the kit) and you start to hear what I suspect is the advantage of the 122s' active electronics. There's just that sense of a greater reach with the R-122s, a superior transient resolution and more detail and texture to extreme low and high reaches of the response. Which isn't to say that the 101 does a poor job here; it just suffers in comparison to its more expensive stablemate. With a variety of different instrumentation — acoustic guitar, congas, upright piano — a definite trend emerges. At moderate distances there's not a great deal of difference between the two — perhaps just a little more LF extension to the R-122 and that suggestion of a little more detail to the mid-range. But move closer or further and the differences become more pronounced. But actually, the reduced proximity effect and slightly reduced HF reach of the R-101 suits some sources better than the R-122 does.

It's most noticeable in the application that ribbon designs have been gaining more and more traction in recently — jammed up close and personal to a guitar cab. While the R-122 sounds a little overwhelming here in the low

end, the R-101 delivers a sound that just immediately fits in a mix for crunchy rhythm or delicate lead sounds alike — and the difference between the two mics is quite startling. This more forward, slightly scooped characteristic isn't limited to electric guitar. Be brave and set up an R-101 18-inches back from

a kick drum and angled slightly sideways and you'll be rewarded with a remarkably punchy and weighty sound that blends nicely with either a single overhead pair or other close mics. And yes, it handles the SPL here with no problem whatsoever.

In summary, the R-101 is a capable performer. I think that what Royer has done is quite clever. It's produced an entry-level microphone that doesn't disgrace the rest of the range but has a character all of its own too. And it's almost as if it has deliberately engineered it to be entry level in a different sense of the

word too. Place it reasonably close to pretty much any source and it delivers a well balanced sound without too much fuss or need to fiddle around with placement or EQ. It's not quite in the same class as the 122 (yes, you can hear the difference that an additional 700 notes buys you) but as an introduction to the world of quality ribbon microphones, with the established Royer pedigree and build quality, it sits at or near the top of my list. ■



## PROS

Pedigree and build quality (lifetime guarantee — first reribbon for free); generally smooth, flattering sound; works well close up.

## CONS

Doesn't have quite the reach and high-mid detail of its more expensive siblings; heavy for its size; needs mating to a decent, quiet preamp.

## EXTRAS

Royer says its Sling-Shock Microphone Shock Mount is maintenance free and provides excellent isolation between a mic and the stand. It uses no materials that are prone to deterioration from age or use and is a departure from traditional shockmounts that rely on stretched rubber bands or rubber bushings. The Sling-Shock suspension uses a non-resonant nylon cord and damped tensioning springs and is designed to work indefinitely with no loss of performance or function. Its tension balance compensation is user adjustable and the mic clutching mechanism offers greater adaptability by enabling critical position adjustments to the mic.



## Contact

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