



RØDE TF-5

JONATHAN ALLEN tests this stereo pair on the London Philharmonic Orchestra

Tony Faulkner knows his microphones and I was fascinated to audition a new slim cardioid he's designed with RØDE. The Australian manufacturer has a large range of microphones, for this release they decided to build from scratch and have a completely new design. I previously assisted Tony on many classical sessions at Abbey Road, and have huge admiration for the way his albums sound. He's in an elite bunch of engineers where his sound has a distinctive character. Tony knows very well what other microphones on the market do, so I wanted to know if he'd found a gap in our toolkit with the TF5.

Out of the box the TF5 is a lovely-looking microphone and has the welcome feel of professional kit. It's solid and weighty and snaps nicely into a well-made clip. The microphone comes with a stereo bar that helps you easily match angles and space to 40cm (handy for recalls too). Seconds after opening the box I was doing an A/B with a KM84 on an upright bass with a great jazz player, who was chuffed to bits with a gorgeous new bass.

Spot the bass

I positioned the mics more for finger and fret than 'fat', about 30cm from the bridge, and the difference was quite marked — I was surprised by how much low end I was hearing compared to the KM84, which was better balanced at this proximity. The low end was more like a subcardioid or even an omni, and to me slightly clouded higher details. This was definitely a different type of cardioid, so I ditched the 84 and moved the mic into a sweeter spot for the TF5, which then balanced frequencies nicely. At

the previous proximity a bit of a dip with EQ around 75-80Hz (wide Q) gave a totally fine response, but moving it around into different positions gave better results. It's a very detailed mic, so it increases the possibilities available. The frequencies balanced nicely and it was a lovely natural sound.

The next instrument was a flugelhorn, and the proximity effect really helped this time, opening up the sound into a lovely natural tone. I did think that, close up, the mic exaggerated the high end, being a fraction too lively with the flugel 'spit'. At this point I checked the rejection and frequency response around the pattern, and it's very even and very quiet at the 'dead' end of the mic.

They really are beautifully balanced and you get a cracking image between them. They make you listen and work to get what you're aiming for because after all, the more you can hear, the more details there are to explore. The drums I recorded were nicely balanced. Again there was more top than I heard in the room on the high-hat and brighter cymbals, but this same lift really helped the snare. We often dial that in after to add sizzle, but I'm not sure I'd do that with these mics. The toms had a natural tone and depth and there was a lovely musical engagement with the sound. It sounded effortless with the dynamic range and transients.

Recording the London Philharmonic

Then I used them on an orchestra (LPO) as a classic ORTF above the conductor in Abbey Road Studio 1, and then as a pair of woodwind spots. They are remarkably open for a small capsule cardioid microphone. I think you could



do a radio broadcast on just the pair if needed (as long as you were in a cracking acoustic). Imaging, depth & detail were all there, and there was a lovely shine to the woodwind. I still thought the fizz/spit from the trombones was accentuated, and at this point looked at the frequency response graph, which shows an uplift around 10kHz, which I guess helps more situations than hinders. When I blended them with my main room mics they sat in the mix very well, and it was at this point I think I really understood what Tony was after when designing these.

As a pair they respond very well in an acoustic and you get a lovely round sound, even if you are at a distance from the source. So even though they are cardioid, the microphones are able to blend spotted detail very naturally and easily with other microphones (say your main omni pick-ups in a classical situation), which isn't always the case with cardioids or some ribbons. It was the same effect when I had them as a pair above a woodwind section. Essentially, the microphones helped achieve the ability to hear less tech and more music, a hallmark of Tony's own recordings.

Neumann gave the 84 microphone the initials KM, standing for kleine mikrofon (little mic) — I think RØDE and Tony have elegantly followed this tradition and offered something modern and very versatile. I also thought the size and colour of the microphones would make them an attractive option for filmed broadcasts of classical music or jazz, helping you get a quality stereo pair discretely placed much closer to where you'd actually want it (and a happy film director). I tried to guess the retail price and they cost less than they sounded [street price £1,299/\$1,499]. Anyone looking to expand their collection with something fresh, especially as a stereo pair, should definitely try them out. www.jonathanallenrecording.com

resolution/VERDICT

PROS Excellent build quality, superbly balanced stereo pair, effortless with transients and dynamics, discrete for filmed broadcasts.

CONS Lift around 10kHz may not be suitable for all occasions.

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