

## THE Audio Various Microphones

Taylor Johnson, of The Sound Room, has been importing Russian mics like the Oktava brand for years, and now he steps out with his own line of microphones. Partially built in Argentina, these mics are well-crafted and pleasant to look at and hold. The metal has a smooth finish with gold bands and a very solid, professional feel. Luckily, they also sound good.

The **KA-04** (\$339) is the heart of several of the mics, as it is the mic preamplifier electronics that some of the mics use (they screw onto the top of the cylinder-shaped body). Class A electronics (no electrolytic capacitors in the audio path!) and transformerless output give this mic body low noise and high output. You can run seven different capsules off of the KA-04, including the 1/2" diaphragm diffuse series with the **KR-2W** wide cardioid and the **KR-1D** diffuse omni. For more standard 1/2" small diaphragm applications there's the **KR-2C** standard cardioid, **KR-1F** standard omni and **KR-3H** hypercardioid. The **KR-25A** and the **KR-33A** are lollipop-style capsules with 25 and 33 mm diaphragms. All mic capsules are sold separate from the mic body.

The **KR-2W** (\$299) is a bright-sounding mic, great for drum overheads, room mics and murky upright piano, but close mic'd acoustic guitar comes across as scratchy and overly bright. Like most small diaphragm mics, I found it to excel on some sources but fail on others. The brightness it imparts isn't "wrong", and the shimmer it brings out on cymbals can be really useful and not just "harsh". The omni **KR-1D** (\$299) exhibits many of the same qualities as its cardioid brother, but is even better sounding on upright piano. Both of these mics have been built for distant mic'ing, where the high end bump adds clarity. If I had one in my arsenal I would certainly use it when I needed that quality, and a pair of either one would make some great, shimmering drum overheads!

The **KR-2C**, **KR-1F** and **KR-3H** mics have less of the high end accent and find better usage at a close range, like on acoustic guitar and piano. And in my habit of using gear the wrong way, I also found the **KR-1F** to make an excellent room mic for drums, with a slightly flat, neutral feel to the sound. One problem I had with all of the small diaphragm choices was that they look similar (some have vents on the side, some don't) and given the seemingly random number/letter identities I had a hard time remembering which was what type. I would imagine that most people wouldn't end up with every variety though, and would decide for themselves what applications the mics work best at.

The **KR-25A** is a medium diaphragm condenser set up in a lollipop-style mounting (\$489). It sounds best on instrumental textures - acoustic guitar isn't too boomy or too bright, cello sounds perfect through this (and held up in a busy rock mix) and piano is really clear in the midrange, sitting in a mix with little effort. It doesn't sound as good on voice as the larger diaphragm **KR-33A** (\$539) does, with its subtle mid boost. Backing vocals tracked on the 33A mic pressed through the mix at low volumes - exactly what I was looking for. On acoustic guitar it also shines, possibly beating the **KR-25A** with a mellow high end, but on piano it didn't sound quite as good, with mid range lacking a little. On electric guitar amps the above mics were able to handle the high decibels and provided full, rich tones, comparable to the Langevin **CR-3A** that I frequently use.

And there are more mics, but they do not use the KA-04 electronics as they have their own built in. The **KP-6M** is an Earthworks-styled "test" mic with an omni pattern (\$349). Against an Earthworks **TC-30K** it seems a bit brighter, which makes me wonder how flat it is, but that's not to say it didn't sound good. This makes a good room mic, and sounds great on piano too. The **TT-3M** is THE's fancier "test" mic, with an omni titanium diaphragm. It's a bit of a jump, sound and price-wise (\$1350) from the **KP-6M**, sounding better on acoustic guitar and snare drum yet duller on piano, which may be result of a very flat (+/- .5 dB from 5 Hz - 20 kHz) response. This makes a very impressive room mic on drums too, bringing out a certain clarity where many mics usually fail. Since I'm not a room designer, I didn't have an opportunity to use either of these mics as test mics, but I get the feeling the **TT-3M** would stand out for this purpose.

Last but not least, THE offers the unfortunately named **BS-3D** (\$2099). This is a 150 mm wooden sphere with what seem to be two of the **KR-1D** capsules mounted on the sides (think ears), a stand mount on the bottom, and a 5 pin connector on the back. The 5 pin has its own cable that breaks out into two XLR ends, though they are unmarked as to which side is which. When phantom power is on there's also a little THE logo that gains a blue glowing ring around it! Anyway, you probably already guessed that this is a stereo microphone, falling somewhere in between a binaural head and a Jecklin disc in theory and practice. Here's the main test I gave it: I put this ball up in place of any normal drum overhead mics, ready to tear it down in a second if it sounded gimmicky or wrong. It stayed up for the whole session, and the sound of the cymbals was amazing, with the high end sizzle that the other THE mics have, along with perfect stereo imaging, excellent mono collapsing and decent phase coherency with the other mics. It helped give us an excellent drum sound and left me rather impressed. We also tried acoustic guitar on this odd mic, and if one was looking for a cool, spacious sound this would be the ticket. I was left very impressed with the **BS-3D**, and could see a lot of future uses were I to own one.

Congratulations to Taylor and THE for starting up a new line of mics which feature really great quality for the dollar and some excellent, really musical sounds. ([www.theaudio.com](http://www.theaudio.com)) -LC

## HHB Radius 3 "Fat Man" Stereo Tube Compressor

The "Fat Man" compressor features stereo 1/4" balanced inputs and outputs, 15 presets and manual operation, an affordable price (\$460 list) and is housed in an unusual 1/2 rack width, wedge-shaped package (with an angled top that you can't set a beer on). The "tube" is a single 12AX7A running stereo secondary gain on the input (making this a hybrid solid-state/tube device) but the crunch you can get by driving the input knob hard can be interesting and rich - good for fucking up drum sounds! The presets are serviceable, doing a decent job on the tracks they're recommended for (like vocal, bass, guitar, keyboard, etc.), and also fun to spin through randomly to try on the "wrong" settings. Despite this, I mostly enjoyed clicking the box into manual mode and getting more control over the sound. In this mode you can access variable ratio and threshold knobs, but attack and release controls are "fast/slow" pushbutton switches instead of potentiometers, with a hard/soft knee switch as well. The compression circuit itself works pretty well, nothing mind-blowing like an 1176 or a Distressor (not that I was expecting that), but certainly good enough to get the job done without undue coloration (it doesn't affect the signal adversely like some cheap compressors), and easy to use for the recording novice. There are also a lot of bonus features that add to its versatility, like a pair of line-level 1/4" inputs on the front panel (great for synth/drum machine inputs), a +4/-10 switchable operating level and a cute little VU meter that can show both output and compression levels. Unfortunately, my unit had a slight output drop on the left channel when fed a mono signal into both front inputs, something that I hope other units don't suffer from, plus I was continually baffled by the presence of both output level and gain make up level knobs. If I can't really see the need for two knobs here, why would an entry level engineer? Also, any buyer should be aware that the stereo channels are permanently linked together and that there are no sidechain inserts available for frequency-dependent compression. But for the price and given all the features, ease of use, and excellent sound quality, this is a great deal for a "first" compressor or as an extra box to have around the studio. ([www.hhbusa.com](http://www.hhbusa.com)) -LC

## Creative Music Production: Joe Meek's BOLD Techniques by Barry Cleveland

This is the ultimate Joe Meek book, with less emphasis on what an oddball he was, and instead there's immaculate research on the gear and techniques Joe employed to achieve his studio nirvana. Known for his echoing, distorted pop songs (everyone knows his big hit, "Telstar"), he was a pioneer in close-mic'ing, freelance engineering, home studio running, and a million other aspects of recording that we take for granted these days. Author Barry Cleveland (who writes for *Mix* and other mags) meticulously researched every aspect of Joe's gear and techniques and, thank God, is an engineer like us so he doesn't make stupid technical mistakes like "rock journalists" always do. Barry even went as far as to locate and remaster a new version of Meek's long lost masterpiece, *I Hear a New World*, which comes with this book. This book really opened my eyes to what an innovator Joe Meek was and even gave me ideas to toy with in future sessions of my own. Everyone reading *Tape Op* would enjoy this book! (\$34.95, [www.artistpro.com](http://www.artistpro.com)) -LC