



Shure KSM313 and KSM353 Ribbon Microphones

FIELD TEST

by [Barry Rudolph](#)

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With its acquisition of Crowley and Tripp Microphones, Shure enters the ribbon mic arena with the KSM313 (Crowley and Tripp's Naked Eye) and the KSM353 (El Diablo Stainless). They are made in the U.S. in exactly the same way, with Shure continuing support for all original Crowley and Tripp mics.

Both of these mics use Roswellite™ ribbon material, a super-elastic conductive and magnetic composite with shape memory and low mass. Invented by medical device pioneers Bob Crowley and Hugh Tripp, Roswellite, unlike conventional aluminum ribbons, is stronger, yet instantly responds accurately to high frequencies and returns to shape after being physically deformed by windblasts, plosives, phantom-power jolts and high sound pressure sources.

The KSM313 Revealed

The KSM313 has what is called a dual-voice design because the two sides of the figure-8 polar pattern are exploited to offer two distinctly different frequency responses and sound. The front (Shure logo) side has the classic thick and creamy ribbon sound, while the backside is significantly brighter--almost like the rising high-frequency curve of a good vocal condenser mic.

The KSM313 has a steel body that's painted black, and its red mesh screening covers the machined sound-entry ports. It feels hefty, and a threaded nut attaches it to a "monocle" swivel bracket that allows for any microphone orientation. The 313 uses direct point-to-point wiring, gold ribbon connections and a high-efficiency, custom-wound transformer. It comes in a foam-lined mahogany "cigar box" case that's expertly built using finger joinery and fancy hardware.

The KSM353 Design

The KSM353 is a "no expense spared" microphone crafted for pristine audio in studio and concert hall applications. Like the 313, it's also handmade and comes in a tall wooden box that looks like it should hold a delicate astronomical instrument or a nuclear fuel rod.

The mic has a highly polished, machined stainless-steel tube containing the double-shielded transformer and ribbon motor rigidly joined together for minimal magnetic and RF interference, lowest noise and highest output. Both sides of the 353 are symmetrical in frequency response to minimize off-axis coloration.

Rockin' Ribbons

In the studio, I recorded both electric guitar and vocals using these mics. I used a GML 8302 mic preamp, AEA's RPQ preamp or the studio's API console pre's, and found that both mics produced more level than old vintage ribbon mics or a Royer R-121. As with all of the ribbon mics I tried for this review, I found that mic placement and source distance were very critical to the sound. When close-miking, moving a few inches up, down, back and forth yielded huge sonic changes.

In separate tests, I placed both the KSM313 and KSM353 close to one speaker of a Marshall Hendrix reissue cabinet. I used an Orange Tiny Terror Top set to 15 watts and did tests with both the guitar player and re-amped direct guitar recordings coming from 24-bit/96kHz Pro Tools HD sessions.

On both vocals and guitar cabinets, I found the KSM313's logo side to sound full and round, reminiscent of the RCA 44 ribbon with the RCA sounding slightly "honky" in the midrange. The backside sounded very close to the front of AEA's R84 ribbon--more extended high



Shure KSM 313 Ribbon Microphone



Shure KSM 353 Ribbon Microphone

frequencies, yet it retained most of the fat low end. I liked the option of turning the 313 around for a different sound, but if you carefully aim the mic at the speaker's center, you'll always get enough highs if you require. By way of comparison, a good-sounding Royer R-121 was slightly "scooped out" in the midrange relative to all these mics.

Compared to the 313, the 353 sounded bigger in the low end and exhibited smoother high frequencies on both vocals and guitars. For voice-overs, it has a good neutral sound without special emphasis on any particular frequency area, such as the Coles 4038 with its brontosaurus bottom end.

For vocals, the 353 has a near-condenser sound but is smoother in the high frequencies and never seemed to overload, making it a good choice for sibilant or shrill-sounding singers. The only downside was that I could not trust the included shock-mount to keep the KSM353 from nearly sliding out and hitting the floor--this mount seems all wrong for a mic of this caliber and price point. (Shure acknowledges this and promises a better mount soon.)

Mics You Can Count On

PRODUCT SUMMARY

COMPANY NAME: Shure Microphones

PRODUCT: KSM353, KSM313

WEBSITE: www.shure.com

PRICE: KSM353, \$3,320; KSM313, \$1,560

PROS: Great sound, virtually indestructible Roswellite ribbons.

CONS: Insufficient shock-mount for the KSM353.

The KSM313 and KSM353 are rugged, worry-free ribbon mics that you don't have to baby. Their warm and clean sound make them great all-around sonic alternatives to a studio's or live stage's workhorse condensers and dynamics.

Barry Rudolph is an L.A.-based recording engineer. Visit his Web site at: WWW.BARRYRUDOLPH.COM



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