The NT2-A is a front-address studio FET condenser microphone with switchable patterns (omni, cardioid and figure-eight), a dual high-pass filter (active at 80Hz and 40Hz) and a -5dB or -10dB pad, all of which are controlled via easily accessed switches found on the front of the mic just below the grille. Beautifully constructed from nickel-plated cast metal in a fashion typical of the new breed of Rodes, the NT2-A mounts to your stand of choice and is designed to minimise noise particularly in circumstances where the existing mic cabinet looks a little bare (which is often the case with smaller home studios), you typically want one mic that will work in a number of situations on a variety of instruments and, ideally, one that offers a number of polar patterns.

The venerable Rode NT2 has been a popular mic in that regard since its release over ten years ago and since then Rode has released an army of alternatives to choose from. Now, its successor (perhaps in name only), the Rode NT2-A has arrived, offering more polar patterns, a new dual-diaphragm capsule (identical to the transducer found in the Rode K2) and superior sound quality to its predecessor.

Character Reference

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Rode Noise

The self noise and electronic noise of the NT2-A are excellent both in practice and on paper, so you can be sure this mic will never contribute to noise on your recording chain. Like the other ‘new breeds’ at Rode, the NT2-A has a characteristic of being constructed using modern computer-assembled surface mount technology designed to minimise noise and hum, the results of which are reliability, improved speech and whisper quiet operation. With a self-noise of a minuscule 13dB, this mic produces virtually no audible electronic noise whatever, even at very high gain levels you have to strain your ears to hear it. The on-axis response of the mic, on paper, is also good, with a gentle rise above 10kHz that adds presence.

I’ve had the NT2-A for a good period of time now, which has allowed me to test it in a variety of configurations with a number of sources, from vocals and choir to acoustic guitar and harmonium. I’ve also compared the mic to a few of the old favourites in my mic cabinet (yes, I actually have a mic cabinet now, and it’s likely it will be getting bigger and better over the coming years). However, back to matters at hand…

Armed with an NT2-A I’ve recorded as many musical, vocal, dialogue, and exotic instruments as I’ve had the need to capture over the last few weeks, comparing and getting to know the mic in a number of situations. Interestingly, there were virtually no situations where I put up the mic and went, ‘Oh well, better get out the old blah, blah, blah… this just isn’t cutting it.’ The NT2-A sounded great on all sources. It was quiet and accurate and the different polar patterns allowed me to use it in circumstances where a fixed-pattern mic would have been far less effective. The mic has a nice smooth top end (thanks in at least part to the newly developed capsule) that doesn’t sound too bright on vocals, and a tight and accurate bottom end, which exhibits none of the ‘woolliness’ common in the lower harmonic register of many large-diaphragm condensers, even when placed close to the hole of an acoustic guitar. For vocals it’s accurate, without possessing the ‘character’ afforded by some tube mics.

There again, depending on what you’re recording and the sound you’re after, accuracy can either be a shortcoming or a benefit. But for mine, the accuracy of the NT2-A equates to versatility and is therefore in no way ‘limited’ by this characteristic – quite the contrary. So-called ‘character’ of tube mics can actually be a problem when you’re trying to capture the ‘real sound’ of an instrument without any colouration. To this end the NT2-A is excellent.

Enlightening Comparisons

Comparisons with other mics were also very enlightening. Without any hesitation, the NT2-A’s performance against all expensive microphones, whether I had tried them or not, I already knew what sound those mics would give me (or rather, what they would not), so there was no point in using them, I had become a microphone snob. And really, I didn’t think this was a bad thing to be, in most cases. I still don’t.

So when I travelled to Australia recently to track a new production I was initially disappointed to find that the mic closet at the well-appointed Sydney studio had only a few of my old friends in it, and none of them were the high-end tube or condensers! But there were lots of Rodes! And in my opinion, the new options were exciting and made a huge difference to my work.

At Compass Point Studios, I have had many great mic models available to me over the years, including Neumann U47, U48, U49, U87, U47 for, U89, MM44, AKG C72, 414, TELEFUNKEN ELA M251 and a host of other famous models. Yet, most of what I wanted was the mic closet at the well-appointed Sydney studio had only a few of my old friends in it, and none of them were the high-end tube or condensers! But there were lots of Rodes! And in my opinion, the new options were exciting and made a huge difference to my work.

Which brings me to one final point to mention – the mic was damn close to other benchmark mics and again, performing admirably in the studio regardless of whether it was 30cm away from a drum (the NT2-A can actually handle up to 157dB with the pad engaged – handy when recording jet engines during takeoffs) or picking up the nuance of a wind instrument. For vocals it was equally convincing.

I really tried to find fault with this mic but with mic for the sake of this review but couldn’t, in the end, find a single one – it really is a great performer in its own right. My only criticism is that it doesn’t come in any other colours. So, no 18 karat gold model? Just black and nothing else.

I now have another quality, viable option to try out. Seeing as I have a number of high-end mics in my cabinet, I might have to do a little selling, but not to anyone looking for a well-priced, no-compromise multi-pattern condenser microphone. It sounds great, is well constructed and is made right here in our own backyard, making it an option for Australians to purchase that our US and European competitors (for a change)! I would like to see Rode manufacture a companion pop filter that could use the screw mount on the bottom of the mic at some point in the future – if they did it would be icing on the cake. The NT2-A is an all-round winner that’s versatile enough to take on the innumerable mixing tasks that the world presents.

Second Opinion – Terry Manning of Compass Point Studios, The Bahamas

Terry Manning has engineered and/or produced albums for Booker T & the M.G’s, Sam & Dave, Led Zeppelin, George Thorogood, 2 Top etc. For more on Terry Manning and his engineering work with Lenny Kravitz, check out Issue 3 of AT.

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$895; SM2 Shockmount: $107.80

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