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## Rode

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**The Rode NT55 small-diaphragm condenser mic comes with two interchangeable capsules, a low-cut switch, and a pad switch.**

The Rode NT55 (\$499) is a small-diaphragm condenser microphone that utilizes the same 1/2-inch, gold-sputtered transducer as the critically acclaimed Rode NT5. However, the NT55 offers interchangeable capsules (it ships with cardioid and omni patterns), a variable 3-position pad (0, -10, and -20 dB), and a highpass filter (flat, 75 Hz, or 150 Hz). Like other Rode microphones, the self-noise of the NT55 is very low. Yet it handles SPLs up to 156 dB, so it can stand up to just about anything that crosses its path.



The Rode NT55 has interchangeable capsules, as well as 3-position switches for pad and low cut.

Each NT55 comes in a tin case with a hard foam insert and a sturdy clip. (The foam has two extra slots, so hopefully additional capsules, such as figure-8 and supercardioid, are on the way.) The NT55 is also available in matched pairs.

### A Familiar Face

The NT55 is somewhere between the AKG 451 and Neumann KM 84 in size and shape, so you can easily guess the applications it is best suited for — acoustic guitar, strings, percussion, hi-hat, and snare drum. The mic seems well built and the capsules easily screw onto the body.

My only problem with the mic was with its clip, which is made from hard plastic. Considerable force is required to snap the NT55 into place (it doesn't slide in, as you would expect). Once in the clip, the NT55 is very secure.

The NT55's pad and filter switches are recessed, so you will need a pointed object to adjust them. Although it requires a bit of effort to change the settings, their position mitigates any accidental switching.

### Six-String Strut

The first test for the NT55 was on my prized Tacoma acoustic guitar. This instrument sounds like money when heard live in a room, but the only good recordings I've experienced were with a 451 or KM 84. I now have to add the NT55 to that list. At about 2.5 feet back, with one mic pointed at the 12th fret and another at the back of the sound hole, the guitar took on a natural and dry character with both cardioid capsules.

Swapping out the cardioid capsule of the neck-position mic for the omni capsule opened up the room sound a bit and gave the guitar more air, while yielding a brighter tone. Going back to the manual, I noticed that there is a fairly significant bump around 10 kHz on the omni capsule.

Moving the other mic closer to the guitar's body increased the cardioid-induced proximity effect. This created a different guitar sound, because the extreme top and bottom frequencies were now more pronounced. Engaging the highpass filter at 150 Hz removed some of the low-end buildup, and I was pleased with the resulting tone.

The highpass filter employs a gentle 12 dB-per-octave curve, which is a good thing, because the NT55 doesn't have an overblown bottom end to start with. I wouldn't call it thin, but it would not be my first choice for low-end instruments such as bass or a surdo drum.

The beauty of the NT55 is in its midrange detail, which I really loved. The sound of my fingerpicking was very clear, yet strumming with a pick did not result in a "splanky" sound, which can often happen with small-capsule condensers on acoustic guitar.

Swapping out the cardioid capsule of the sound-hole mic for the omni capsule allowed me to set the microphone closer without further low-end buildup. And lowering the highpass setting to 75 Hz resulted in a present and full-sounding guitar tone with a better sense of space around it.

### On the Bright Side

The NT55 also excels on bright percussion such as hi-hats, shakers, and bongos. The diaphragm responds very quickly to transients, so any instrument with a sharp attack would be a good candidate for this mic. In particular, I got a great tambourine sound without that bizarre low-end aliasing that's common with large-diaphragm condensers.

On violin, I got a nice, intimate sound using the cardioid capsule. The omni capsule sounded too bright for my taste when it was positioned close to the instrument; it sounded better farther away, where the pronounced room sound was compensated for by the lift in the top end. However, both sounds would be useful, depending on the musical application.

### The Røde to Glory

I really liked the fact that by changing the capsules and moving the microphones around, I was able to get noticeably different tones with just two NT55s. All the while, the midrange stayed constant and clear. Although no further EQ was required for a good guitar sound, I was able to drastically equalize the tracks without the tone falling apart — another sign of good detail in the midrange.

Coupled with a quiet microphone preamp, the NT55 is an excellent choice for the most critical of applications. With a street price of around \$350, Røde has another winner in its stable.

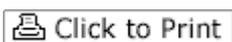
#### Value (1 through 5): 4

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