

3 Best Shure Mics for Acoustic Guitar: Specs & Price

Meta Description: Discover the 3 best Shure mics for acoustic guitar. Compare the SM81, KSM137, and KSM141 on specs, price, and sound to find your ideal studio mic.



Alt text: Shure SM81-LC Condenser Microphone.

Key Takeaways

- The Shure SM81-LC is the industry-standard small-diaphragm condenser with over 45 years of studio credibility, a ruler-flat frequency response from 20Hz to 20kHz, a lockable -10dB pad, and vinyl-coated steel construction built for decades of use.
- The Shure KSM137 delivers modern transient accuracy through an ultra-thin 2.5-micron gold-layered Mylar diaphragm, a Class-A transformerless preamp, 14dB-A self-noise, a subsonic filter, and SPL handling up to 159dB.
- The Shure KSM141 adds mechanical polar pattern switching between true cardioid and omnidirectional response to the KSM137's capsule and preamp design, giving engineers maximum flexibility for close-miking, ambient capture.
- All three are small-diaphragm condensers designed for the fast transient response acoustic guitar demands, and all three work in both studio and live settings.
- [Shop all three microphones at Sam Ash](#) with free shipping on orders over \$49 and a 45-day return policy that lets you evaluate your new Shure in your actual recording environment.

What Makes a Great Acoustic Guitar Microphone

Recording acoustic guitar well is one of those tasks that separates a good microphone from the right microphone. The instrument produces a complex mix of string attack, soundboard resonance, body reflections, and room interaction, and capturing all of that faithfully requires a small-diaphragm condenser that can track transients fast enough to preserve the detail that defines how an acoustic guitar actually sounds.

Shure has been building microphones for this exact job for decades, and three of their small-diaphragm condensers stand out as the strongest options for acoustic guitar work at different price points and with different strengths. The SM81-LC is the proven studio standard that engineers have trusted since the late 1970s.

The KSM137 brings modern capsule technology and lower self-noise at a more accessible price. The KSM141 adds switchable polar patterns for engineers who need both focused and ambient capture from one mic.

This guide compares all three so you can figure out which one belongs in front of your guitar.

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Shure SM81-LC

Sam Ash Price: \$439.00



Caption: The SM81-LC has been a studio fixture for years, trusted by engineers worldwide for its flat, neutral response and virtually indestructible build quality.

Alt text: Shure SM81-LC Condenser Microphone.

Specifications

[The SM81-LC](#) delivers a ruler-flat frequency response spanning 20Hz to 20kHz, providing neutral reproduction that captures acoustic guitar without imposing tonal coloration. Its cardioid polar pattern maintains consistent directional characteristics across the entire frequency range, offering maximum rejection of off-axis sound with minimum coloration.

The microphone handles a maximum SPL of 136dB, extending to 146dB with the lockable -10dB pad engaged, providing ample headroom for close-miking aggressive playing styles. Self-noise measures 16dB-A, acceptably low for most studio applications, though slightly higher than Shure's newer KSM designs.

Features

Shure designed the SM81 for professional applications demanding reliability across decades of continuous use in both studio and live environments. A three-position low-frequency response switch offers flat response, 6dB per octave rolloff, or 18dB per octave rolloff for controlling proximity effect and rejecting low-frequency rumble from stages, air conditioning, and handling noise.

The lockable -10dB pad includes a special tool to prevent accidental disengagement during sessions, ensuring consistent gain staging throughout performances and recordings. The microphone operates on standard 48V phantom power but functions with supplies as low as 11V with reduced headroom. Vinyl-coated steel construction withstands the rigors of touring while remaining resistant to temperature and humidity extremes that compromise lesser microphones.

Choose This If

You want the proven industry standard that engineers worldwide trust for acoustic guitar. The SM81 excels in studios where predictable, reference-quality performance matters more than the latest technology, for touring applications demanding bulletproof reliability, and for engineers who value the flat, neutral starting point that makes mix decisions straightforward.

Shure KSM137



Caption: The KSM137's ultra-thin gold-layered Mylar diaphragm captures pick and fingernail transients with speed and clarity that make it a standout for acoustic guitar detail.

Alt text: Shure KSM137SL Condenser Microphone.

Sam Ash Price: \$396.00

Specifications

[The KSM137](#) employs an ultra-thin 2.5-micron, 24-karat gold-layered Mylar diaphragm that achieves exceptional transient response, capturing the initial attack of picks and fingernails with remarkable accuracy. Its Class-A, discrete, transformerless preamplifier delivers transparency with near-zero crossover distortion and minimal harmonic and intermodulation distortion.

Frequency response spans 20Hz to 20kHz with a subtle presence lift between 4-9kHz that helps acoustic instruments project in mixes without requiring aggressive equalization.

Maximum SPL handling reaches an impressive 134dB, extending to an extraordinary 159dB with the -25dB pad engaged, accommodating literally any acoustic guitar playing style. Self-noise measures 14dB-A, representing a meaningful improvement over the SM81's specification.

Features

Shure engineered the KSM137 as a modern evolution of small-diaphragm condenser technology, incorporating advances in capsule manufacturing and circuit design while maintaining the reliability that professional applications demand.

A built-in subsonic filter eliminates frequencies below 17Hz caused by air handling systems, foot traffic, and mechanical vibration before they reach your recording chain.

The three-position pad offers 0dB, -15dB, and -25dB attenuation settings, providing extraordinary flexibility for sources ranging from whisper-quiet fingerpicking to aggressive strumming inches from the soundhole.

The three-position high-pass filter offers flat response, -18dB per octave at 80Hz, or -6dB per octave at 115Hz for tailoring low-frequency response to specific rooms and guitar body sizes. Gold-plated internal and external connectors ensure reliable signal transmission across thousands of sessions.

Choose This If

You want modern transient accuracy at an exceptional value. The KSM137 excels for engineers who prioritize detail and transparency, home studios seeking professional performance without premium pricing, and applications where capturing every nuance of fingerstyle technique matters more than the heritage of an older design.

Shure KSM141



Caption: The KSM141's mechanical polar pattern switching provides true omnidirectional response alongside cardioid, giving engineers two genuinely different microphone characters in one body.

Alt text: Shure KSM141 Multi-Pattern Condenser Microphone.

Sam Ash Price: \$504.00

Specifications

[The KSM141](#) shares the KSM137's 2.5-micron, 24-karat gold-layered Mylar diaphragm and Class-A transformerless preamplifier, adding mechanical polar pattern switching that transforms a single-diaphragm capsule between cardioid and true omnidirectional response.

In cardioid mode, the frequency response shows a gentle presence lift between 4-14kHz peaking approximately 2dB at 9kHz, while omnidirectional mode exhibits extended low-frequency response rising smoothly to 2.5dB at 20Hz with broader high-frequency lift spanning 2-20kHz. Maximum SPL handling reaches 131dB, extending to 156dB with the -25dB pad, while self-noise measures 14dB-A in both polar patterns.

Features

The KSM141's defining feature is its mechanical polar pattern switching system that transforms the capsule's acoustic behavior by opening or closing rear porting vents.

Unlike electronic pattern switching that combines multiple diaphragms with phase manipulation, this mechanical approach produces a true omnidirectional pattern with authentic pressure-microphone characteristics, including absence of proximity effect and exceptionally smooth low-frequency response.

A knurled ring below the capsule rotates between clearly marked positions with positive detents ensuring definite pattern selection. The microphone shares the KSM137's subsonic filter, three-position pad, and three-position high-pass filter, providing comprehensive acoustic control regardless of selected polar pattern. Each KSM141 ships in a hard-plastic carrying case with windscreen and stand adapter.

Choose This If

You want maximum flexibility from a single microphone investment. The KSM141 excels for engineers who value creative options, studios recording in acoustically treated spaces where omnidirectional patterns capture natural room character, and applications requiring both close-miking precision and ambient capture without switching microphones.

3 Best Shure Mics for Acoustic Guitar Comparison Table

Feature	Shure SM81-LC	Shure KSM137	Shure KSM141
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Sam Ash Price	\$439.00	\$396.00	\$504.00
Type	Small Diaphragm Condenser	Small Diaphragm Condenser	Small Diaphragm Condenser
Polar Patterns	Cardioid (fixed)	Cardioid (fixed)	Cardioid + Omnidirectional
Frequency Response	20Hz – 20kHz	20Hz – 20kHz	20Hz – 20kHz
Max SPL	136dB (146dB with pad)	134dB (159dB with pad)	131dB (156dB with pad)
Self-Noise	16dB-A	14dB-A	14dB-A
Pad Options	-10dB (lockable)	0/-15/-25dB	0/-15/-25dB
High-Pass Filter	Flat/6dB/18dB per octave	Flat/80Hz/115Hz	Flat/80Hz/115Hz
Diaphragm	Electret condenser	2.5µm gold-layered Mylar	2.5µm gold-layered Mylar
Subsonic Filter	No	Yes (sub-17Hz)	Yes (sub-17Hz)
Included Accessories	Swivel adapter, windscreen, case	Stand adapter, windscreen, case	Stand adapter, windscreen, case
Legacy	45+ years industry standard	Modern KSM series	Modern KSM series
Best For	Proven studio standard, versatile recording	Superior transient response, modern clarity	Maximum flexibility, stereo recording

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Selecting the right [microphone](#) for acoustic guitar recording requires understanding how different designs interact with your specific guitars, playing style, and acoustic environment. Sam Ash has served musicians and recording engineers since 1924, accumulating a century of expertise in matching recording equipment to creative requirements.

When you call the Gear Experts at 800-472-6274, you connect with working audio professionals who have tracked countless acoustic guitar sessions and can offer insights

about positioning techniques, stereo configurations, and preamp matching that product specifications cannot convey.

We back every microphone purchase with a 45-day [return policy](#) that recognizes how acoustic guitar recording depends on room acoustics, guitar characteristics, and personal preference.

Our 60-day price protection guarantee ensures you receive the best price even if costs drop after your purchase, while flexible financing through Synchrony and Affirm spreads your investment across manageable monthly payments.

[Free shipping](#) on orders over \$49 delivers your new microphone ready to capture your acoustic performances without additional costs, diminishing your recording budget.

[Shop our microphone collection today!](#)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Which Shure microphone is best for fingerpicking acoustic guitar?

All three microphones excel at fingerpicking, with the KSM137 and KSM141 offering slightly better transient response for capturing the subtle attack of individual finger movements. The KSM141's omnidirectional mode allows extremely close positioning without proximity effect, making it ideal for intimate fingerstyle recordings.

Can I use these microphones for live acoustic guitar performance?

Absolutely. All three microphones are designed for both studio and live applications, with the SM81's vinyl-coated steel construction proving particularly durable for touring. Use the high-pass filters to reject stage rumble and the pads for loud monitoring environments.

Do these microphones require phantom power?

Yes. All three microphones require 48V phantom power, which most audio interfaces, mixing consoles, and standalone preamps provide. Reduced phantom power (as low as 11V) will function but with decreased headroom and sensitivity.

Should I buy a matched stereo pair?

For serious acoustic guitar recording, particularly in stereo configurations, factory-matched pairs ensure consistent left-right imaging that individual unit matching cannot guarantee. Both the KSM137 and KSM141 are available as matched stereo pairs at Sam Ash.

Which microphone handles loud strumming best?

[The KSM137](#) offers the highest maximum SPL handling at 159dB with its -25dB pad, making it ideal for aggressive strumming styles or extremely close positioning. The KSM141 follows at 156dB with pad, while the SM81 reaches 146dB.

Prices mentioned in this article are accurate at the time of publication and may vary. Please visit [Sam Ash](#) for the most current pricing and availability.