

“With both capacitor and dynamic mics, I couldn’t reliably tell the difference between the JS-3 and the Allegro. They are both very, very good. The Palmer, too, provides a lot of transparency and is also a good listen...”

Alistair McGhee



Microphone Splitters

Everyone knows that mics are naturally monogamous: one mic, one lead, one channel. That’s how it’s supposed to be. But one is never enough in the world of live, FOH has to have a feed of course, but the monitor mixer needs some love too, and if you’re really adventurous, then there’s a recording truck after some shared microphone action. And here’s a word about safe splitting... If someone you know suggests sharing a mic over a Y lead, I advise you to get out of that relationship, as it will end in tears.

No, if you want to split safely, the minimum you need is a transformer-based mic splitter. If you are lucky you only need a couple of splits, and rather than splashing out on a rack of transformers or getting entangled in the heady world of active splitters, you need one or two channels of high quality transformer splittage to keep everyone happy. So where do you start?

Well, you start with a quality transformer. And the big names here are Lundahl (Sweden), Jensen (USA), and Sowter (UK). Though, currently I can’t find a Sowter-based mic splitter. I think that’s a gap in the market.

Radial JS-3

Let’s start on the other side of the pond with Canadian kit from Radial. We love its DIs, the company uses Jensen transformers, and it has a big rep. You have a choice of Radial splitters with one or two split outputs alongside the ‘direct’ output – the one everyone fights over. I tried the two output JS-3 (that’s two splits and a direct, hence the ‘3’) for this review. The standard Radial case is a steel book format with nice rounded corners, and the overhang of the ‘covers’ give some protection against kicage of switches or roadies stomping on your connection. It is a beautifully finished piece of kit that looks and feels like the business.

mmstudioz Allegro

From Sweden we have a new contender: mmstudioz is an outfit just starting out offering a price advantage (as you buy direct) and the much favoured Lundahl transformers. I had the Allegro model, which also has two split outputs alongside the direct out. The Allegro comes in a

standard extruded case with Neutrik connectors and very positive earth lift switches. The finish is robust and professional.

Palmer Audio Tools PMS-02

And finally, a new name to me, Palmer Audio Tools. Made in Germany (includes the transformers). The Palmer PMS-02 has a simple trick up its sleeve: it’s a two-channel device offering direct outputs from its two inputs, and two additional splits per channel. It’s a sturdy diecast box with Neutrik XLRs, and some nice screen printing on the top plate. There are two ground lift switches on the side of the box, which are intuitive in operation, but nonetheless would benefit from labelling.

Down To Business

First off, I should say these are all well made, professional quality products, and all of them are relatively expensive, although remember that the Palmer gives you two splitters in one box. All will give you years of hard service.

I think the Radial has the best exterior design and finish – the overhang protects your connectors and the switches, and the finish and feel are tops. My one question is why have a fitted non-latching XLR on the input? Like the Palmer, the in and direct outs are on the same face, which I prefer.

The Allegro has a split next to the input, and on the back the direct and the second split. The Allegro has a utilitarian feel – but very professional. It has a locking input XLR, is considerably lighter than the other two, and like the Radial features lovely non-slip footage that stops it sliding round the stage.

The Palmer is surprisingly compact for a dual splitter, and though plenty robust is still lighter than the Radial. I think the side mounting of the earth lift switches keeps the size down, but they are prone to kicage. Palmer supplies some stick on rubbery feet, but this is in no way as comprehensive as the foam-type base on the Allegro and Radial.

With both capacitor and dynamic mics, I couldn’t reliably tell the difference between the JS-3 and the Allegro. They are both very, very good. The Palmer, too, provides a lot of

transparency and is also a good listen, but I felt the Radial and Allegro edged it. However, I’ve heard bigger differences between the same model of mic, or the same mic seeing a different input impedance.

Both Bill Whitlock at Jensen and Per Lundahl of Lundahl were very willing to answer my questions. Lundahl favours the widest bandwidth possible, while the Jensen HF philosophy is according to Bill, “...every transformer we make be tailored to gradual, linear-phase roll-off that generally behaves as a second-order Bessel low-pass filter.”

Looking at core saturation as a fixed (line) level out of and into my sound card (this is a higher impedance input than most mic amps though!), the Allegro leads the way, followed by the Radial, with the Palmer in third place. However, bear in mind Palmer does a line level splitter if that is what you want, and the Radial has a 30dB pad included.

Conclusion

The Radial stands tall for the deepest of pockets – best build, big name transformer, and the dynamic range extension from the 30dB pad.

For an equally big name, high performance transformer from Lundahl, a solid build, and that locking input XLR, plus a handy price advantage (in Europe that is), the Allegro from mmstudioz is a very strong contender.

The winner for value is the Palmer – the ‘buy one get one free’ of our splitter trio. 🎧

THE REVIEWER
ALISTAIR MCGHEE began audio life in Hi-Fi before joining the BBC as an audio engineer. After ten years in radio and TV, he moved to production. When BBC Choice started, he pioneered personal digital production in television. Most recently, Alistair was Assistant Editor, BBC Radio Wales and has been helping the UN with broadcast operations in Juba.

Information

Manufacturers
Radial Engineering
www.radialeng.com

Mmstudioz
www.mmstudioz.com

Palmer Audio Tools
www.palmer-germany.com

Price Details
Radial JS-3: TBC
Mmstudioz Allegro (MM1121): €198.00
Palmer PLS02: €302.00