

JZ BLACK HOLE

A Multi-Patterned Condenser for the Rest of Us

by Cliff Goldmacher

Having cut my teeth in Nashville, I've recorded a lot of acoustic stringed instruments as well as a full complement of vocalists. To cover most contingencies, I've set myself up with a couple of great mic preamps (the Manley Vox Box for vocals and the Avalon VT 737sp for instruments) through which I run almost every track I record. But while I've settled on a couple favorite pres, I switch out mics a lot—and I'm always open to trying something new. This time it's a new mic called the Black Hole from a Latvian company named JZ Microphones.

OVERVIEW

No one can accuse JZ of making a product that lacks a distinctive look. From the beautifully designed wooden box to the one-of-a-kind shock mount and, of course, the mic itself, in terms of aesthetics the Black Hole brings something new to the table. But as we all know, looks don't always correlate to sound quality.

My unit came *sans* owner's manual, which made assembling the shock mount a bit challenging. Thanks to a rudimentary knowledge of geometry and an iron will, I was able to get it all together. After that little hurdle, there wasn't much to figure out. There's a simple switch just on the inside of the rectangular hole of the mic, which allows you to toggle the pickup pattern from omni, to cardioid, to figure 8. Instead of regurgitating the specs, we'll discuss how I used it, and how it sounded; for specific details about the design, surf on over to www.jzmic.com.



The JZ Black Hole.

IN USE

My first test was on acoustic guitar. My default mic for acoustic guitars is the Røde NT-2—I like its clarity and presence. Generally, I tend to stay to the side of the sound hole when miking this instrument, pointing the mic diagonally toward where the neck meets the body. I employed a similar approach with the Black Hole and, simply put, the sound was extraordinary. The omni setting was a bit too boomy, and in figure 8 the sound was

slightly less focused; but in cardioid, the sound of my acoustic was clear, present, and focused with the addition of really nice air at the top end of the sound. I could hear the warmth of the wood and the brightness of the strings. Home run.

Next up were a couple of vocal sources. My main vocal mic is the Lawson L47-MP, which I like because it tends to be balanced, warm, and clear. I thought it a fair test against the Black Hole as they both sit at a similar price point. On male vocals, the Black Hole wasn't my first choice—it lacked the low mid warmth of the L47-MP. That said, it handled the vocalist's natural 2–3kHz peak well, and it imparted a nice breathy, airy quality on the top end, though it veered dangerously close to brittle. My instinct is that a male singer with a slightly darker tone would shine on this mic. The vocalist I was working with? Not so much.

On a female source with a significantly less aggressive tone, the mic did a good job of picking up the air and breath in her voice without sounding annoyingly bright. I wished for more low-mid roundness in her vocals, but the Black Hole did well on

her voice. This served as a confirmation that, at least to my ears, the Black Hole is better suited to singers with “darker” or less aggressive approaches.

Just for fun, I decided to put the Black Hole up on an unlikely source: the flugelhorn. Yes, you read that right. As the mic supposedly handles up to 135dB, I placed it about a foot away from the horn's bell. It sounded pretty good; the lack of a pad switch didn't prove to be a problem at all. While miking a flugelhorn may not be the most practical application, it rounded out the tests, and spotlighted the Black Hole's versatility.

CONCLUSIONS

The Black Hole is truly stunning on acoustic instruments. In fact, in cardioid mode, it produced perhaps the best acoustic guitar sound I've ever squeezed out of a mic. If I were looking to purchase one mic that handled a variety of sources well instead of a slew of mics that only deliver on specific instruments, I'd definitely put this one high on the list. 🎧

PRODUCT TYPE: Multi-pattern condenser microphone.

TARGET MARKET: Serious recording enthusiasts looking for a versatile, pro-level mic.

STRENGTHS: Innovative design approach. Holds its own with other high-end mics. Truly stunning on acoustic instruments. Five-year warranty.

LIMITATIONS: Lacks a bit of “warmth and forgiveness” for naturally bright vocals.

LIST PRICE: \$2,295

CONTACT: www.jzmic.com