

# JZ BT-201 Condenser Microphone Review

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AFFORDABLE CARDIOID HAS OPEN TOP END, INTERCHANGEABLE CAPSULES



The BT-201 comes with a cardioid capsule with wide cardioid, omni and stereo pairs available optionally.

The BT-201 is Latvian manufacturer JZ Microphones' take on a small-diaphragm pencil studio condenser mic. Its unique appearance is reminiscent of a '60s TV announcer's stick mic, with a slim black body tapering to a teardrop-shaped capsule. The 13mm-diameter electret capsule offers a sensitivity rating of 11 mV/Pa and a max SPL handling of 140 dB without requiring a pad. Capsules are hot-swappable and come as cardioid, wide cardioid and omni (more on that later).

The head amp is a discrete Class-A circuit that uses a FET and no output transformer. There are no pad or low-filter switches. The mic's body is made from a machined-brass alloy and measures 6.35 inches long and one inch in diameter. It will fit into most dynamic mic clips such as Shure's SM57, which is a good thing as no clips or shock-mounts are included. My review pair came with two optional JZI-7 shock-mounts made by Rycote that sell for \$104 each.

## In the Studio

My first job for the BT-201 was recording a Martin D-15 mahogany acoustic guitar. I placed the mic about 16 inches away, aimed at the 12th fret and at about the player's chest height. I recorded with no equalization or compression, straight into Pro Tools HD at 24-bit/96kHz using 45 dB of gain from my RTZ 9762 mic preamp (based on the Neve 1272 design). I tried all three capsules.

The wide cardioid pattern produced the best results, as it captured this dreadnought guitar in the most balanced way — not overly bright or excessively boomy. It sounded just like the guitar sounded in the room. The regular cardioid setting was also good but not quite as rich sounding. The omni yielded even less bass because of the lack of proximity effect, but as with any omni mic, the overall sound was more open, pulling in more room sound — including my computer's fan noise.

The BT-201's hot-swappable feature is nice. I liked changing capsules on-the-fly; while in use, they stay solidly on the mic's body, but when changing them you do have to mute the mic's

channel to avoid loud pops. The Rycote shock-mounts are a must, and I'd recommend a good pop filter for vocal recording.

Next, the pair went to work as wide-spaced cardioid drum overheads through a vintage Neve 8028 console. Compared to the 30-plus-year-old AKG C 12As that they replaced, the JZs, with wide cardioid capsules, were a lot brighter, making them better for light traditional jazz drumming where you might desire the extra articulation. However, for this particular hard-rock session with a cymbal-bashing drummer, they didn't work out.

PRODUCT SUMMARY	
<b>COMPANY NAME:</b> JZ Microphones	
<b>PRODUCT:</b> BT-201	
<b>WEBSITE:</b> www.jzmic.com	
<b>PRICES:</b> \$515, single mic/single capsule; \$635, single mic/three capsules; or \$1,349, stereo pair (all MSRP)	
<b>PROS:</b> Well-made, three included hot-swappable capsules, bright sound.	<b>CONS:</b> No mic clips or shock-mount or any other kit included, bright sound.

But at another studio, the BT-201's bright sound worked well for a rock piano sound. I had them set to omni and placed just at the edge of the crook of a Steinway 6-foot grand. Using Digidesign's C24 console mic preamps and no processing, I placed the mics facing directly across the harp and aimed at the hammers.

Compared to a pair of Audio-Technica AT4050s in the same location, the BT-201s were brighter — they gave me the brightness I wanted to cut through a dense track. To achieve this kind of percussively bright sound, I usually place mics right over the hammers. With the BT-201s placed farther away, I got a wider sound that captured more of the piano's total sound: the soundboard, harp, hammers and the recording space itself. It sounded less compressed than it usually does when close-miked.

## Rockin' Pair

The JZ BT-201 comes in a foam-lined wooden box in several variants: A single microphone with a single cardioid capsule is \$515. You can also buy a single mic with cardioid, wide cardioid and omni capsule heads for \$635; or \$1,349 buys a matched stereo pair (reviewed here) where each mic has the three capsules. Extra capsules are \$105, and there is also an optional wide cardioid capsule available with a built-in -20dB pad for \$130.

A matched pair of JZ BT-201s makes an excellent addition to any collection. These mics have a high output level and require little or no processing to capture great sound — particularly from pianos, acoustic guitars and quieter or more somber instruments. I liked all three capsules that come with the mics and found the quick-change, hot-swappable feature very useful and preferable to pattern switches.