By Barry Rudolph

JZ MICROPHONES VINTAGE 11 CONDENSER MIC

Low-Cost Cardioid-Only Mic Features Solid Build, Great Sound

JZ Microphones' new Vintage 11 condenser microphone is an all-new design but shares its sonic "pedigree" with the company's more expensive Black Hole models. Similarly sized and shaped as the other mics in the Vintage Series, the V11 employs a more modest shock-mount design than the V47, V67 and V12 models. But at $699 MSRP, it's also the least expensive in this line of cardioid-only, large-diaphragm condenser mics.

The "11" stands for the year 2011, marking exactly two years since JZ introduced the cardioid-only Vintage line in homage to the classic German and Austrian-made condenser microphones of yesteryear. JZ's Vintage Series mics are designed to emulate the sonic qualities of those classics while introducing new manufacturing technologies, various improvements and affordable pricing.

MODERN AND HAND-MADE

The V11 is assembled only in JZ's Latvia factory by hand and uses a body made from brass and aluminum. It has a rugged metal mesh screen but no internal wind/pop filter. Access to its interior is by way of two small, recessed screws on either side of a gold-pinned XLR output connector on the bottom of the mic. There are no pad or roll-off switches on this mic to become problematic with age or heavy use, as is typical with older condenser mics.

The capsule electronics use an FET-based amplifier and are all Class-A with an electronically balanced output (no transformer) circuit similar to the Black Hole line. The V11 has an output impedance of 50 ohms with a suggested load impedance of greater than 500 ohms. Sensitivity is 22 mV/Pa measured at 1 kHz into a 1 k-ohm load.

The construction and design of the internal electronics package offers a modern, practical touch. This entirely handmade circuit is sealed within a module made of a high-impact composite material. So if ever required, it is easily replaceable—a good "plug 'n' play" idea for field repair, it seems. But JZ recommends that a JZ-certified restorer replace it at their factory in Latvia.

The V11 uses a large, 27mm diameter dual-membrane capsule in a holder made of carbon fiber. As with all JZ capsules, it was designed by Juris Zarins. It's externally charged (not an electret) and is manufactured using JZ's Golden Drop sputtering technique.

Specifications: frequency range is 20 Hz to 20 kHz; equivalent noise level (DIN/IEC A-weighted) 6.5 dBA; max SPL of 134 dB for 0.5% THD @ 1 kHz; and a dynamic range specified at 128 dB.

The JZ Microphones Vintage 11 features a brass and aluminum body and rugged metal mesh screen.

IN THE STUDIO

For me, setting up the V11 was slightly restrictive because there is no swivel ball-joint mount system as found on the other Vintage mics. The mounting bracket has two thumbscrews with knurled heads that have self-retaining rubber bushings that act like mini shock absorbers when mated to the threaded holes in the mic's base.

This system does prevent extreme rumbling noises from coming up from the floor and affecting the sound, but lightly tapping on the mic stand did produce audible bumps in the audio. JZ has a nascent accessory line (an excellent pop filter, mic clips, etc.), and perhaps they have a version of the Black Hole's com-

bined shock-mount and pop filter system coming for the Vintage Series.

My first use for the Vintage 11 was for voice-over and Foley recordings for a video project. For the voice-over session, I set the mic up on a straight stand (no boom). Once adjusted, my narrator stood in front, about six inches away, and sounded excellent with plenty of warmth and presence. This is not an overly bright condenser mic that might exacerbate sibilants. In all my uses of the V11, de-essing was never needed.

I used the mic preamp in the studio's SSL AWS 900 console and noticed the Vintage 11 provided more than enough output level for this application. I used mic gain settings in the range of 25 to 35 dB.

The V11's very low noise floor was essential when I recorded a few Foley effects. I was helping out on a battle scene in a short movie trailer clip; we recorded walking, clothing noises and general background sounds. The mic worked flawlessly in capturing these effects, although the sound was slightly dark, but nothing an equalizer wouldn't fix. However, its lift in the low frequencies did sound great for body hits and falls where the extra "oomph" added dramatic impact.

But for every new setup, I had to carry a screwdriver in my back pocket to readjust the mic's positioning, since it has only a single brass screw to tighten and lock it into position. I think this screw should be replaced with a conventional, easy-to-turn wing nut, as is common on other mics.

After using many different mic preamps, I found the V11 always required about 5 to 10dB less preamp gain than my usual choices of tube and solid-state condenser mics. In general, for a given distance from the source, I noticed the V11 had more proximity effect as compared to my tube reference microphone, and this ability was useful for my next test—a distant mono drum room recording.

Unless I'm lucky to be working in a great-sounding room, my experience with actually using the sound picked up by distant drum room mics is sketchy at best. The V11 promises

TRY THIS

I positioned the V11 in combination with a RØDE NT4 X-Y stereo mic positioned about 3.5 feet over a drum kit. I angled the V11 toward the drummer's face and not directly down at the cymbals and kit. I placed the RØDE at exactly the same height and as close to the JZ mic's location as possible.

I liked the ability to blend the sounds coming from the stereo width and brightness of the RØDE with the warmth of the V11 panned to the center. Even with only about 20-percent of the V11's level added to the overhead mic mix, the overhead drum sound thickened with a meaty increase in the lows.

To correct any phasing issues that occur when using multiple microphones on a common sound source, I always test and use (if required) Sound Radix's Auto-Align plug-in when I mix. Mainly because all mics were placed so close to one another, there were no severe cancellation problems—or if there were, they were acceptable as a "vibey" overhead drum mix. The best test is to combine all sources in L+R mono and check for any cancellation. There was none, so maybe I got lucky.