

## JZ Vintage 12 “V12” Cardioid Large-Diaphragm Condenser Mic

Latvian craftsmen of world-class microphones introduce a modern classic LDC inspired by the legendary AKG C 12.

I've previously reviewed both the Vintage 47 (V47) and the Vintage 67 (V67) from JZ Microphones' Vintage Series, which are sonically modeled after the Neumann U47 and U67, respectively. I was surprised to find them closely emulating the timbres of those highly desirable mics. This time around, we audition JZ's Vintage 12, directly comparing it to its much-lauded inspiration, the classic AKG C 12.

### Features

The V12 shares the exact same body, metal-flake finish, stand-mount and design simplicity (transformerless, no pads, no filters, no switches, cardioid-only) as the other Vintage Series microphones we reviewed. Therefore, the operative difference is the capsule — this time, the GDC12, a 25mm diaphragm utilizing JZ's Golden Drop technology, “a sputtering technique where a precisely engineered pattern of golden dots is distributed across the diaphragm,” according to JZ promotional material. The V12 handles 134 dB max SPL with 6 dBA of self-noise.

### In Use

I began by recording electric guitar overdubs (via a AMS-Neve 4081 preamp), pairing it with a Shure SM 57 on the same speaker. As is typical in this config, the V12 picked up a much fuller bottom than the SM57, had much flatter mids and a little bit



more sizzle up top, as condensers usually do. I liked the warmth of the V12 and the top-end bite was just about right, too — but its bass was often a little woofy, especially

with the proximity effect due to its close position to the sound source. With a little bass rolloff, the V12 sounded excellent. We stacked a lot of divergent guitar tones with

Rob Tavaglione has owned and operated Catalyst Recording in Charlotte, NC since 1995. [catalystrecording.com](http://catalystrecording.com)



the V12, including clean, “brown” and super-saturated; the V12 translated the little details of the tones faithfully across the board, showing ample versatility.

With light and breathy vocal performances, the V12 picked up a nice airiness and intimate detail, remaining smooth even with lots of gain. Another vocalist really let the V12 have it with some over-the-top rock stuff (although he would occasionally lean in for a quiet line or two as well). Through it all, the V12 translated that sometimes-awkward transition with ease. With just a straight-up, middle-of-the-road baritone guy, vocals sounded simply fantastic with minimal effort; the signal chain was the V12, Manley TNT tube preamp, Chandler Germanium compressor, a light Universal Audio de-esser and LA2A emulation on mix, no EQ.

No review of a vintage-inspired mic would be truly complete without some good old A/B comparisons, so I rented an original AKG C 12 from Blackbird Audio Rentals in Nashville. Blackbird’s Rolff Zwiép sent me a beauty of a C12 (serial number #0882, if you’d like to rent it and listen for yourself). I miked up my trusty Taylor solid-top acoustic guitar with the C12 and V12 as coincident as possible, backed up about 18 inches so the mics’ placements would be equidistant, used two identical channels of Earthworks 1024 preamp and laid down a test clip.

The AKG C 12 had a huge, enveloping bottom-end, musical and slightly sculpted mids with a top end, that is, as you may know, extremely sweet but nowhere near overbearing [Listen to audioclip #1]. In comparison, the V12 had a less-substantial



The C12 and V12 positioned as near to coincident as possible.

low end with some similarities (and some differences) in the mids and a noticeably brighter, edgier top end with seemingly quicker transient response [Listen to audioclip #2]. I tried to EQ away the differences between the two mics, but still couldn’t get the characters to match as closely as the V47 and V67 did with their Neumann-inspired classics.

I also rented the modern AKG C 12 VR (serial #0051) and repeated my test. Interestingly, the C 12 VR was quite bright compared to the V12 with a rather different bottom end and some different accentuations in the midrange. Fact is, the C 12 VR sounds more like a V12 than an original C 12.

Further and more detailed testing revealed the V12’s response to different impedances to be quite interesting. For example, I recorded some jangly percussion tracks: tambo, shaker, cabasa, etc. Here, the V12’s slightly sizzly top end is a bit too much and too grainy at lower impedances (600 ohm), but works much better with more resistance (10 kohm). The V12 picked up plenty useful top-end and impressively gutsy lows on djembe, with the variable impedances offering additional fine-tuning. Using the solid-state side of my Manley TNT preamp, I found the V12’s nuanced sensitivity to impedance to be a versatile “paintbrush,” with all settings potentially useful for vocals: a stark mids-accentuated intimacy at 300 ohm, an in-your-face flatness at 600 ohm, a slightly

scooped high frequency-emphasizing response at 2 kohm and a compressed low-mid thickening at 2 Mohm.

Here’s the bottom line, according to what I’ve heard: the Vintage 12 sounds only somewhat similar to an original C 12 (even if it sounds more like a C 12 than the C 12 VR does), but it does not capture that subtly sweet top, that robust bottom, nor that elusive C 12 midrange quality. However, with a variable impedance preamp at the user’s fingertips, a V12 is a flexible vocal paintbrush, imparting magic and mood in some wonderful ways.

## Summary

OK, so the JZ V12 doesn’t quite do what its Vintage Series brethren do — that is, quite accurately capture the vibe of a specific classic tube mic with which they (surprisingly) share almost zero physical qualities. But that’s hardly this review’s conclusion. The Vintage 12 sounds fine in its own right; comparisons aside, this mic sounds great on acoustic instruments, electric amps and voices, too. It’s exceptional on voices, actually.

Admittedly relying on memory, the V47 and V67 both sounded very good on vocals, too, but I believe the V12 is a little more versatile than either of those models. All three JZ Vintage Series models bring color and personality to the table and they are really quite similar, despite their tonal differences. Yes, their slightly delicate-looking windscreen/basket is still there, as is that slightly too-limited-in-range, stand-mount swivel; I think these features could use some improvement.

But once again JZ Microphones has made a carefully crafted, well constructed, and great-sounding large-diaphragm condenser that is quieter and more dependable than a your standard premium-priced vintage tube microphone, and for a fraction of the cost, whether it precisely mimics its namesake classic or not.

**Price:** \$1,895 direct

**Contact:** JZ Microphones | [jzmic.com](http://jzmic.com)

## Selected Audio Clips: JZ Vintage 12

Visit the link below to hear clips referenced in Rob’s review of the JZ V12.” -Ed.

[prosoundnetwork.com/JZV12](http://prosoundnetwork.com/JZV12)