

# JZ Vintage 47 & 67

Another take on recreations of venerable classics? **JON THORNTON** discovers some refreshing interpretations that look and feel distinctly different.



We live in an era where we've never had it so good as far as microphones are concerned. In terms of choice, affordability and performance, the large diaphragm condenser market in particular has exploded in the last two decades. Yet despite all of the advances in electronics and construction methods, there remains a tremendous reverence reserved for a handful of classic microphones whose development was rooted in an age where a 405 line television system was the height of high definition.

Neumann's U47 and original U67 are two such microphones, and the last ten years have seen no shortage of recreations, replicas and 'homages to' these microphones from boutique manufacturers and larger concerns. Latvian manufacturer JZ's Vintage series joins the fray, and makes no bones about where the inspiration is drawn from with the Vintage 47 and Vintage 67 models.

Somewhat refreshingly, the inspiration in this case is confined to the sonic characteristics of the microphones, with no attempt to ape the external construction and size of the originals. That said, JZ clearly couldn't resist the temptation to pursue the 'vintage' tag when it came to the look and feel of the microphones, and has come up with a flattened curved body that looks and feels just like a hip flask. Perhaps that's explained by the fact that lurking inside is a capsule assembly employing what JZ terms 'Golden Drop' technology.

The aesthetics might be a matter of taste, but construction seems very solid, and there are a couple of neat features worth a mention. The first is the fact that the capsule and head grille assembly is very unobtrusively shock-mounted from the main microphone body — so unobtrusively that the resulting flexing might at first be misinterpreted as some dodgy build quality. The second is the incorporation of a

swivel mount directly into the microphone body. This consists of a ball joint that terminates in a coupling for a standard mic stand thread. Slackening a knurled screw allows this to rotate freely for screwing onto a mic stand, and tightening it allows the microphone to be locked off with a degree of side-to-side and front-to-back tilt. It's neat and works well for applications like vocal recording, although it doesn't afford quite enough movement for easy positioning in some other applications.

The Vintage 47 and 67 employ different capsule designs but both feature the aforementioned 'Golden Drop' technology, which describes a technique for sputtering gold on to the diaphragm in a precisely controlled fashion. According to JZ, this significantly reduces overall diaphragm mass with resultant improvements in transient response and lower colouration. In keeping with their respective inspirations, both capsules are double diaphragm designs featuring 25mm diaphragms although the capsules are significantly different in terms of construction. Despite the dual diaphragm layout though, there's no polar pattern switching and both microphones are fixed pattern cardioids.

In contrast to this quest for authenticity in capsule design, the electronics employed in the Vintage series are unashamedly modern — discrete Class A solid state with no transformers in sight. The advantage here is evident in the quoted specs: nice healthy outputs (22mV/Pa) and low equivalent noise levels (6dBA) for both microphones. With that in mind, there's a lot resting on those Golden Drop Capsules to deliver that characteristic sound.

Not being lucky enough to own any variety of U47, or indeed an original U67, I'm not going to attempt to qualify how these microphones compare to the originals. That's certainly a valid approach, but instead I decided to concentrate on how they sound in relation to some (slightly) more modern and more commonly available designs — the U87 and the Sony C800, both set to cardioid patterns with no filters or pads.

First to be put under the microscope was the V47 (having first removed the small screw that holds the diaphragm assembly in place for transit) with sung male vocals, on axis and about 15cm distant. First impressions are that it sounds more neutral than you'd expect certainly in comparison with the U87 and C800, both of which seemed to bring out a little more character in the mid range of the voice. Listen harder though, and there's a definite sense of gutsiness to the low-end that's not apparent in the C800. Switching to female vocals and the V47 seems a little more at home; it pulls off the difficult trick of capturing a delicately sung vocal with plenty of presence and clarity in the upper mids while keeping a good sense of weight to the voice, and takes a healthy dose of HF shelving EQ if necessary without sounding harsh.

Swapping in the V67 for the same applications shows that there really is quite a marked difference in the characters of these microphones. On male vocals there's a little more edge and detail to the mid range that helps give real authority to the vocals sound, but without sounding too aggressive or hard. The same characteristic is there, albeit less noticeably on female vocals, although it's perhaps not quite as musical sounding here.

Acoustic guitar was the next stop although that trick built-in swivel mount held things up a bit. The restricted degree of movement means that setting the mic in this application is somewhat tricky with a standard tripod type boom-stand. But patience and some unconventional stand placements paid off, as both the V47 and V67 deliver some exceptionally useable (although quite different) sounds out of the box. As expected, the V67 sounded that little bit more forward and larger than life, the V47 a touch more restrained. While that adjective is often accompanied by 'soft' or 'dull', that's not the case here. Again, there's a really solid low end even at fairly long working distances so it's not just proximity effect at work here. And it's never a dull sound, it's just a sound with detail and resolution in the mids and highs that minds its own business and doesn't have to shout about it. In comparison with the U87 it sounds a little more rounded, but never dull.

I preferred the sound of the V47 on this particular acoustic guitar although having the luxury of being able to switch between the V47 and V67 is something that I can see being very useful (and potentially addictive) to adapt to different guitars and players.

Finally, I tried both mics individually as single microphones on a drum kit — starting overhead just over a metre above the snare, and then moving forward in an arc to settle in front of, but approximately 50cm distant from, the kick drum. Again, it's easy to hear the potential here. In neither case was the sound as 'out-of-the-box' useful as with the guitar, but it's easy to fine tune with a little low-mid scoop to deal with the combination of room modes and off-axis response. My vote in this case goes with the V47 in overhead position, and the V67 in front of the kick. Probably the opposite of what I was expecting, but the V47 sounded that little bit smoother and the V67 seemed to deliver a little more in the way of attack to the kick sound.

It's clear from everything I put in front of these microphones that JZ has done a very good job here. Perhaps most impressive is the fact that they seem to have delivered the musicality, warmth and colour so many people associate with their classic forebears while using modern, clean and very quiet electronic stages. Which must mean that those capsules really are delivering the goods — albeit at a price Euro 1325 each. They're not outrageously priced, but they don't try to undercut the competition either. And having both available to really fine-tune them to a source really is quite addictive. Could turn out to be expensive for me... ■

## PROS

Extremely quiet; detail and warmth without harshness; V47 and V67 complement each other well; useful built in mounting system.

## CONS

Built-in mount makes positioning hard in some situations; no pad or filter — a pad especially would be really useful; love or hate looks.

## EXTRAS

JZ Microphones is now shipping its new LDC Vintage 12 condenser microphone. This also employs Golden Drop Technology and employs transistors rather than the original's valves.



## Contact

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