

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN & Producer MICHAEL BASKETTE on recording *Mammoth WVH*

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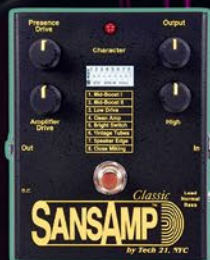
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JZ Microphones Signature BB29

*A simple, elegant design with
a classy, polished tone*

REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

The Signature BB29 microphone is the latest offering from JZ Microphones. Based in Latvia, JZ is named for chief designer Juris Zarins. Juris launched JZ Microphones in 2007, after repairing and designing microphones for other companies for close to two decades, including Violet, now consolidated under the JZ banner. The Signature BB29 is the first offering from the company to use an output transformer.



Slim and sleek

The BB29 can be described as elegant simplicity. It is cardioid only and offers no onboard pads or filters. It has an 8" x 2.5"x1" rectangular body, with a textured black finish and a silver JZ logo on its chest. Surrounding the capsule is a gently rounded rectangular multi-layer gloss-black windscreen. At 11.64 oz., the BB29 is exceptionally lightweight.

The BB29 is similar to the popular JZ Black Hole microphone, minus the center cutout. It also bears more than a passing resemblance to the BLUE Blueberry—see the ‘designing microphones for other companies’ comment above.

Mount-up

There are two ways to mount the BB29 to a mic stand. If you are in a situation where vibration is not an issue, a mounting thread is built into its underside next to the XLR connector. Option two is the aptly named BB29 Holder (sold separately). This attaches to four silver hubs on the side of the microphone via two elastic nylon bands. This shock mount is equally as minimal and elegant as the microphone, and despite the added cost, I would call it an essential purchase for the BB29 owner. Thanks to its shape and weight, the BB29 is very easy to position and place, in even the tightest spaces.

Little drops of gold

Like all JZ microphones, the BB29 comes equipped with what JZ calls ‘Golden Drop Capsule’ technology. More than just an

evocative moniker, like buttery smooth chardonnay or a salted caramel latte, Golden Drop is quite literal. Most microphone capsules use a gilding process of ‘sputtering’ a thin layer of precious metal (typically gold) over mylar. Typically, this process coats the entire surface of the capsule. A JZ Golden Drop capsule uses randomly sized discrete drops of gold alloy spread over the diaphragm. According to JZ, this design makes the capsule lighter, making it react faster to incoming sound waves and yielding a more precise capture along with reduced coloration and distortion. All of this can be distilled into one word—clarity.

Single diaphragm

The BB29 uses the same capsule as the BH2 Black Hole series mic. It is an edge-terminated 24mm (1") single-diaphragm / single-backplate fixed cardioid design. This design uses acoustical rear venting to regulate the cardioid pattern rather than the dual-diaphragm method found in most microphones. One advantage of this design is a more neutral and controlled proximity effect.

Transformed

As mentioned, the BB29 is the first model in the company’s fourteen-year run to offer a transformer-coupled output. Perhaps this is the hallmark of the Signature Series? In addition to the custom-wound transformer, the mic is as simple and elegant inside as it is out, with minimal, well-chosen components that are impeccably laid out on the internal circuit board.

Specs

The BB29 has a frequency response of 20 Hz - 20 kHz, a sensitivity of 1 kHz 20mV/Pa, a maximum SPL of 140dB SPL (2.5kΩ, 0.5% THD), an 86 dB-A S/N ratio, 9dB-A noise level, 150Ω output impedance, >1000Ω rate load impedance and a 131 dB dynamic range.

Its frequency plot shows a controlled low-end rolloff from 40 Hz down to -8dB at 20 Hz. Its midrange is flat and even with a gentle 1-2dB bump at 500 Hz, and its upper midrange rises from 2 kHz to 6 kHz, blossoming into a 5dB bump at 7 kHz followed by a 6dB bump from 12 to 15 kHz.

Sonics

I would describe the BB29 as a balance of rich yet natural lows and mids, with a clear, glassy top end. While there is a brightness to the BB29, it is smooth and controlled rather than stark or harsh.

To get my bearings, I compared it side-by-side with an AKG C414 XLS, a well-known benchmark, and a Swedish-made Milab DC-96B. While the DC-96B

is not a common mic, it is a mic I know well and that I find to be close to the vintage U 87 family of sound.

Compared to the C414, the BB29 was more open and detailed on the top end, with a less congested midrange. Interestingly, its sonics were very similar to the DC-96B, again offering just a touch more clarity and a slightly more open low end. This gives me confidence that the BB29 is a mic that lives in the classic workhorse realm and will work anywhere one might traditionally use a U 87-style mic, meaning pretty much anywhere, on any source.

In use

The BB29 offers a great, rich yet detailed capture of stringed instruments from acoustic guitar to ukulele, bowed instruments such as violin and cello, and percussion from jangly tambourine to cajón. Like many mics of this style, you may have a mic that you prefer over another on a particular singer, but the BB29 can give you workable results on most voices, and it takes EQ like a champ.

In addition to its success on acoustic guitars, I quite liked the BB29 on drums, both as a front-of-kit mic or overhead (note I only had one). Cymbals are clear and dimensional without biting, and the snare, toms and kick nicely retain their fullness and weight. The BB29 is an easy mic to blend with close mics on a drum kit. Speaking of which, I very much liked the BB29 on a floor tom. Its size and style make it easy to use and position over the head.

Conclusion

I went into this review with zero idea of what to expect from the BB29, and I am very impressed. From sound to style and price, the JZ Microphones Signature BB29 is genuinely a workhorse microphone that can cover many bases in the modern studio. It is simply one of those 'throw it up and it works'-style mics that we all need in our lockers—better yet, get a pair. ➤

Price: \$1299

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