

PREMIUM U67 EMULATIONS: ADK Z-67 AND SOUNDELUX U99

The Neumann U67 is likely the most emulated microphone of all time. While there are literally dozens of microphone manufacturers trying to capture the nuances of this classic tube mic, only a handful of them are actually doing it well enough to warrant mention.

I have been fortunate to use these two—the ADK Z-67 and Soundelux USA U99—a lot lately. ADK’s Z-67 has been one of my go-to vocal mics for the past five years or so, and I’ve been using the recently re-released Soundelux USA U99 for virtually every project I’ve recorded over the past two months. Both are fine microphones—very impressive and arguably instant classics.

ADK Z-67 MULTIPATTERN TUBE LARGE DIAPHRAGM CONDENSER MICROPHONE

The ADK Custom Shop’s Custom Z-Mod mics—which include the ADK Z-800, ADK Z-251, ADK Z-49, ADK Z-12, ADK Z-47 and ADK Z-67—are ADK’s definitive microphone line. Each model is hand-built in the USA in the sonic

that houses a velvet-lined wood mic case, shock mount, ring mount, pop filter, switchable 230v/115v Power Supply, 16-foot Accusound oxygen free copper 7-pin tube microphone cable, 16-foot Accusound oxygen-free copper XLR cable, and spare replacement tube. An upgrade to the Silver edition (priced at \$2,995 street) swaps the aluminum case with a chic, American-made tweed case, upgrades the cables to the Accusound Silver Pro series and adds a five-piece low-noise tube sampler pack for fine-tuning tonality (as well as adding the \$300 to the price tag).

The Z-67 is extremely musical and, in most situations, requires little to no EQ. Compared to vintage tube microphones, it is stunningly quiet, too. While the mic sounds good on nearly any sound source, its real strength lies in application to vocals and acoustic instruments. I used the mic coupled with the Gordon Model 3 mic pre to record a lightly-strummed Taylor 514-CE acoustic guitar and the result was impressive: rich, full sound with an extended (but not boomy) bottom end. Switching to fingerpicking, the guitar again recorded wonderfully. The mic also sounds fantastic on cello and mandolin.

Over a period of several months, I recorded several male and female vocalists via Z-67 through the Gordon Model 3 mic pre; in every instance, the results were great. The mic’s high-frequency response is smooth and open, and there were no sibilance problems.

I used the mic along with the Retro OP-6 to record electric guitar, too. While I typically lean towards a ribbon (or occasionally a dynamic) microphone for this application, I was pleasantly surprised by how well the mic performed. Since the mic doesn’t have a pad, it’s not perfectly suited for exceptionally loud sound sources. That said, this is likely a moot point as most engineers aren’t too keen on placing a microphone that costs nearly \$3,000 on a sound source that could potentially damage it. Don’t get me wrong,

though; while there isn’t a pad, the mic has a 128 dB maximum SPL, which isn’t too shabby.

Though the Silver Edition costs extra, it’s quite a bonus having the tube sampler pack. While it doesn’t include any NOS (new old stock) gems, it does have enough options to

allow some flexibility to tonally shape the microphone to taste. It’s a bit too time consuming to do a tube shoot-out with a vocalist, but it sure is nice to have some tonal options.

No doubt the ADK Z-67 is a costly microphone, but based on its build quality, included accessories and—most importantly—its sound quality, it is fairly priced. I’ve been using ADK microphones as long as I can remember and I have always found them to be exceptionally rugged and reliable. Any engineer or studio in need of a no-compromise microphone should give top consideration to the ADK Z-67.

SOUNDELUX USA U99 TUBE LARGE DIAPHRAGM CONDENSER MICROPHONE

Beautifully built in the spirit of the classic Neumann U67 to David Bock’s specifications, the Soundelux USA U99 tube condenser mi-

crophone (\$2,599 street) is one of the finest microphones being manufactured today at any price. The tube microphone’s pickup pattern is continuously variable from omnidirectional to cardioid to figure-8. The glossy black and beautiful mic features a European-made K67 dual-membraned 1-inch capsule and is equipped with the same signature Soundelux USA Fat switch found on the U195 mic, as well as an inventive and musical high-frequency Cut-Flat-Boost switch that works in tandem with its Hi-Lo switch.

Dave Bock explains that toggling the Fat switch “changes the bias timing of the tube from ‘traditional 1950s lean’ to ‘modern super size.’” When Cut is selected on the Cut-Flat-Boost switch, a -1 dB shelf is engaged at 10 kHz as well as a 2.5 kHz or a 5 kHz slight cut (depending on the position of the Hi-Lo switch).

(continued on page 32)



The Z-67 is extremely musical and, in most situations, requires little to no EQ.

tradition of one particular classic microphone that is well-known in the history of recorded music. Each of the mics feature discrete Class-A tube electronics and offer nine polar patterns. The Copper (or standard) edition of each mic (priced at \$2,695 street) includes an aluminum case


NEW FOR 2017

ICON REDEFINED.

NEW MODEL
280F / 280FL

AUDIOFIX™
303 INLINE XLR AUDIO CONTROLLED CONNECTOR

Often imitated, never duplicated.

- True rubber flex relief with two ID available
- One-piece plug finger made in the USA
- Switchcraft quality

Inline access to critical signal functions

- Switchable Ground Lift Function
- 180° Phase Reversal
- 20dB Attenuation

INSTANT FIX.



Consistently Excellent since 1946
Connect with us at www.switchcraft.com, or






Soundelux USA

(continued from page 29)

The capsule has an inherent slight 10 kHz boost so activating the cut actually makes the mic flat at high frequencies, very much like a pre and de-emphasis network. The flat setting keeps the amp flat, allowing the capsule's natural 10 kHz lift to come through. The Boost setting is a gentle shelf starting at 5 kHz, allowing a 1 dB boost of the amplifier at 10 kHz. Both cut and boost are active feedback elements utilizing just the single vacuum tube.

The mic provides a 30 Hz to 16 kHz frequency response with an output impedance of 200 ohms and an 81 dB signal-to-noise ratio. The mic is handcrafted and hand-tuned by David Bock himself, utilizing point-to-point wiring and unequivocal attention to detail.

The U99 utilizes a NOS (new old stock) EF732 sub-mini pentode tube coupled with the Bock N470 true-linear high-current power supply to provide a natural sound. The large core output transformer improves low frequency headroom.

Also included with the mic is a 6-pin mic cable and shock mount. In order to keep costs lower, Soundelux USA ships the mic without a carry case; the mic itself is still in a wood box, but there isn't a case to hold the mic, power supply and all of the accessories. Soundelux USA does offer a high-quality case as an option. I think this is a wise decision as it allows the buyer to avoid paying for a case they don't need. I should add that the build quality of the U99 is exquisite; it would be a shame to pack it in a case that would fall apart after a few months of use.



While I was anticipating the U99 to be an amazing mic, it far exceeded my expectations; this mic is stunningly good.

Upon its arrival, I couldn't wait to put the U99 to the test. While I was anticipating it to be an amazing mic, it far exceeded my expectations; this mic is stunningly good. Vocals are the U99's forte and the mic wonderfully captures both male and female vocals. The top end is warm, open

and extended and, while the mic isn't without proximity effect, it is subtler than many vocal mics, providing just enough low-frequency boost to sound rich and full without being boomy or woofy. The overall sound is extremely natural and smooth, and the detail is spectacular as every nuance of a vocal

performance is captured in an amazingly realistic manner.

The mic does a fantastic job capturing acoustic guitars, mandolin and violin, too. I miked the violin from several feet away and it still sounded full, warm and natural with a full body. The realism is great; I found that when I closed my eyes, it felt like I was sitting a few feet from the instrument. I've only had that experience a handful of times in my entire career.

I've found that between the mic's high-frequency Cut-Flat-Boost switch, the Fat switch and continuously variable pickup pattern control, the mic provides an abundance of sonic shaping options that results in rarely needing equalization to attain a desired sound. There are no hard rules here but, after much experimentation, I've found that in most instances, I prefer the high-frequency boost when recording female vocals and darker acoustic guitars. I set the mic to flat when recording male vocals and most acoustic instruments, and I use the high-frequency cut setting when recording mandolin and horns. I start with the Fat switch activated when recording aggressive vocals, solo acoustic instruments and electric guitars. I've typically only used the pad when recording louder sound sources, such as electric guitars and loud percussion elements.

Regrettably, I had only a single U99 for my review period; I wasn't able to do any stereo miking. Based on my tests, though, I believe a pair of the mics would be marvelous on piano or drum overheads.

The Soundelux USA U99 is an impressive microphone. Regardless of your mic locker's size, it's worth a serious look as this is no doubt going to be one of this generation's classic gems.

Lauten

(continued from page 31)

an American-made ultra-low-noise JFET amplifier, 1-inch pressure gradient large diaphragm, and a true-condenser capsule with cardioid polar pattern offering a relatively flat frequency response and a maximum SPL of 130 dB. It is equipped with 120 Hz low-cut and 12 kHz high-cut filters, a transformer balanced output and a spider-style shock mount. Equipped with a threaded base around its XLR input, the LA-220 could be used with a more traditional FET microphone mount, too.

Finally, the LA-120 solid-state small diaphragm condenser (SDC)

package comes as a stereo pair (\$349 street), featuring interchangeable 17 mm pressure gradient condenser cardioid and omnidirectional capsules per mic, American-made ultra-low-noise JFET amplifiers, 50 and 150 Hz low-cut and 10 and 15 kHz high-cut filters and a transformer balanced output. Both LA-120 mics ship in a notably well-made and attractive hinged wooden box with hard mounts enclosed. Also available for the LA-120 kit is a pair of 10 dB attenuator pad adapters, which boosts the stereo kit's maximum SPL handling from 130 to 140 dB SPL.

In my own use, the LA-320 held its own (and was actually preferred by more than a few vocalists and musicians) when auditioned next to

FET options and relatively similar tube LDC competition in the studio; its sound is near frequency flat with a rich, full bottom end and the striking warmth gained via a vacuum tube.

The LA-220 is a no-nonsense, true LDC workhorse. While the LA-220 seems to lack a certain stylistic character—it is quite flat, after all (as many recordists wisely prefer)—it is equipped with legitimately useful filters. In most instances, especially on vocals and key melodic instruments, the filters sound great engaged all the time—set it and forget it, indeed.

My favorite offering of the Series Black line is the LA-120 package. It's simply a great, super-flexible stereo SDC kit at a thrilling price

point. With their high-cut filters, they are malleable, frequency-wise. As a drummer, I have become quite picky when it comes to stereo overheads, preferring a SDC that doesn't over-emphasize mid to high frequencies. Used flat, the LA-120 are generally neutral enough; with the filters, I enjoyed a frequency sculpting tool right at the source. That said, they also shined as a stereo pair above a nice Baldwin baby grand.

In all, Lauten has bookended its high-end leaning microphone range with a "budget" series to be proud of. Though other choices in condensers may be preferable from engineer to engineer, these Series Black offerings are good enough to provide professional grade results in most every recording scenario.