

by Rob Tavaglione

Violet Amethyst Vintage Dual Large-Diaphragm Condenser

This well-designed, carefully crafted Latvian mic is “a first pick for solo vocals of all kinds.”

Its design elements may look vaguely familiar: a detached capsule housing, insect-like segmentation and well-made, Art Deco-styled accoutrements. But the Amethyst Vintage is the pride of a relatively unknown manufacturer/designer: Violet Microphones, based in Riga, Latvia. Benefiting from the talents of Juris Zarins — an original designer for pro audio neighbors Blue Microphones — Violet now offers an extensive line of high-end, condenser microphones at reasonable prices. I recently had the opportunity to use the Amethyst Vintage (and Violet’s Grand Pearl, see accompanying mini-review), and I found both to be worthy of attention.

FEATURES

The \$1,295 Amethyst Vintage (AV) is a dual-diaphragm electrostatic condenser specifically designed to have a “warm, classic

sound, not unlike legendary vintage studio microphones.” (The Amethyst *Standard* uses one diaphragm for a “modern sound.”)

The AV’s two 26 mm by six micron Mylar diaphragms are sputtered with a combination of gold and aluminum to achieve better transient response, wider frequency response and higher output. The AV’s wide-cardioid-only pattern (typical for dual-diaphragm designs), absence of filters or switches, and sleek styling (a distinctive detached-square capsule housing) makes for a straightforward experience in looks *and* function. Its specs are as expected: 20 Hz - 20 kHz frequency response, a low seven dB-A of self-noise, a 134dB maximum SPL and a 50-ohm output impedance.

IN USE

The AV allows direct mounting to a stand without a clip, but I tried the supplied shockmount. It’s small but adequate, and this luxurious-looking elastic spider and the mic’s visual appeal will help inspire timid singers and savvy clients. Despite the shockmount and wide rectangular body, the size of the AV and shockmount will allow some tight placements.

I first tried the AV on my own soft, husky back-up vocals, and I found just what I had expected. A

strong, full bottom was there, and as I leaned way in for proximity effect I found a very workable “zone” of musical, manageable bottom boost (again, typical for dual-diaphragm). The top was smooth, too, but with a noticeable bump around 10 kHz that helped definition without being too sibilant.

The next day I had a very thin-sounding, sibilant soprano vocalist coming in, and the AV was put up next to her usual ribbon mic. She was immediately excited by the AV’s present top (certainly, as compared to the ribbon); I was concerned, however, that we might be missing some much-needed bottom. A quick repositioning of my pop filter to allow closer placement got the AV’s proximity effect in the game, and it added a nicely balanced tone. A touch of bass boost and de-essing was still required in the mix, but the AV’s “classiness” shone through, lending a vaguely vintage mood to her ’70s-inspired music.

The following day I recorded a wildly unpredictable female rocker (an alto), and was skeptical of the AV’s ability to handle her extreme dynamics; I have heard many a diaphragm bottom out from her sustained crescendos. With a Manley TNT preamp (the tube side) and an Empirical Labs Distressor patched in, we got a gorgeous vocal that captured all the power of her loud

passages, and all the subtle detail of the quiet ones, as well. In fact, this mic was more linear and consistent under such divergent conditions than just about anything I’ve used previously.

Solo acoustic guitar did reveal some Amethyst limitations, as its placement seemed unexpectedly very sensitive. Its healthy, flat bottom resulted in muddiness if I miked the dreadnaught guitar’s body anywhere near the sound hole. I found a nice placement between the bridge and hole (for mono “middle”), but I required two more mics to get upper mids, string sparkle and harmonics. Electric guitar was similar, with the AV yielding a thick, warm tone that wasn’t quite “modern” enough for me, but may work well depending on your source and goals.

Later I had a three-



FAST FACTS

APPLICATIONS

Studio, project studio, broadcast

KEY FEATURES

Two Mylar, 26 mm by six micron, gold/aluminum-sputtered, electrostatic diaphragms; “warm, classic” condenser sound; low self-noise, 134 dB max SPL; pleasant 10 kHz “bump”

PRICE

\$1,295

CONTACT

FDW-Worldwide (US distributor) |
 ☎ 800-828-0509
 🌐 www.violetusa.com

PRODUCTPOINTS



- Smooth, “classic/vintage” sound
- Quality design and construction
- Reasonable price



- Wide-cardioid pattern only
- No pads or filters

SCORE

This versatile mic will shine where fullness and presence are required

piece horn section come in for overdubs, and the AV's top boost at 10 kHz proved too much for trumpet, but it did nice things for both tenor sax and trombone. I finally settled on trombone — with placement at about 18

| VIOLET GRAND PEARL

The \$669 Grand Pearl is a unique bird: a mid-sized diaphragm condenser, originally designed for live use. Although I admit I'm skeptical of the Grand Pearl's ability to not “lose its head” during rigorous on-stage use — or not sustain damage to its narrowly attached capsule housing sphere while engaged in performance — I do like it for pleasant coloration in the studio. It has a nice, full sound that is far from flat, but quite useful paired with appropriate sources.

I tried the Grand Pearl at a loud rock band rehearsal where it received ample gain before feedback, with a sound more full than forward. In the studio, it was compatible on both male and female vocals, although it wasn't as exciting sounding as its Amethyst Vintage sibling or my other favorite vocal mics. I did use the Grand Pearl on a particularly throaty tenor sax; it gave me the right stuff by not distorting forgivingly subtle musician movement, and keeping the top end smooth and musical.

The Grand Pearl should be a winner for live sound engineers who work with primarily acoustic acts; its fullness, detail and feedback rejection will allow many applications. Louder stages will find success with the Grand Pearl when used on backup vocals, horns and percussion. But studios will surely provide even more potential uses than stages for the unique applications of the Grand Pearl.

— Rob Tavaglione



inches on axis — and received a strong, but un-hyped bottom end, as well as a clear pleasant top end (absent of unwanted hype). This mic can do many smooth things on horns that many condensers don't, in situations where you'd often reach for a ribbon.

| SUMMARY

Although capable of wide applications, I think the versatile Amethyst Vintage is a first pick for solo vocals of all kinds. This mic will

shine where you may normally go with a U67: when fullness and presence are required. With quality construction, superior design, a “modern/vintage” sound and a reasonable \$1k street price, I recommend this mic to update old veterans' closets, as well as the “my first great vocal mic” for aspiring professionals.

Rob Tavaglione owns and operates Catalyst Recording in Charlotte, NC.



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