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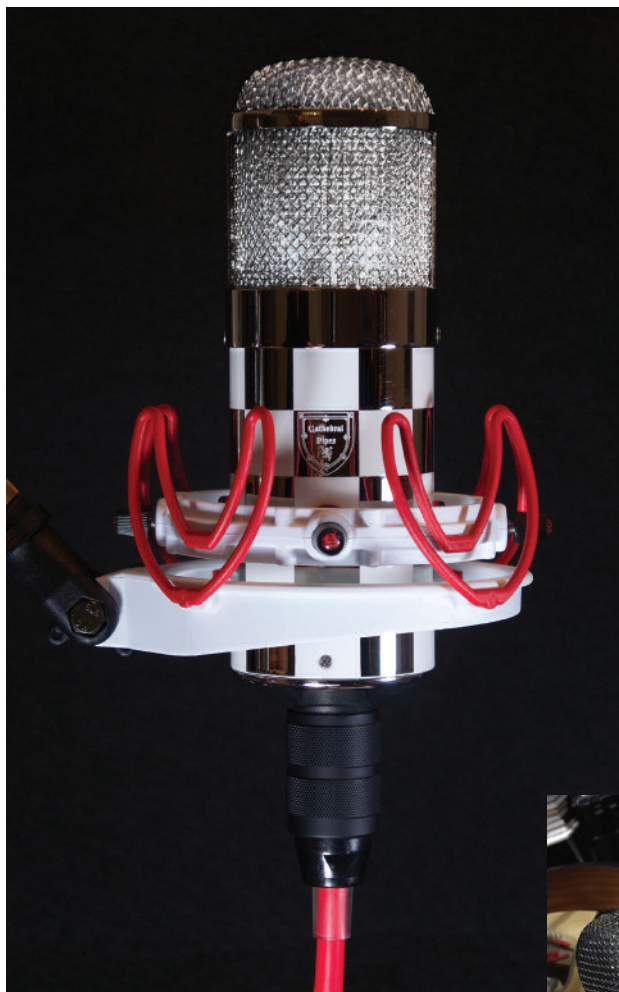


REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Cathedral Pipes Saint Jean Baptiste Vintage FET Microphone

The maker of the world's most eye-catching tube mics premieres a FET design



1. Bright LED lit capsules. The mic literally glows with a beautiful white light from inside the grille. (Charles Dickinson told me that the idea started with a joking response to a client who wanted his mic to be "brighter"!)

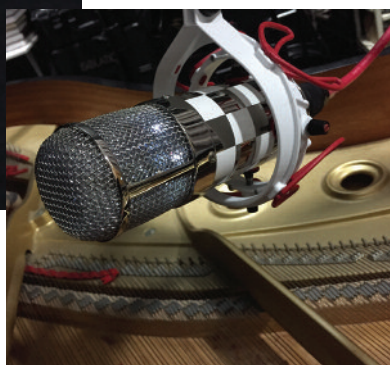
2. French Gothic Chrome exteriors. Each Cathedral Pipes mic features lots of shiny chrome mingled with varied white enamel designs, most of which have a vintage family crest / medieval look.

3. Possibly the best included accessory packages in the business. For instance, the previously reviewed Notre Dame mic came with a large Geiger counter-styled power supply with a voltmeter-styled pattern sector, a large robust flight case, and more. These accessories are of the highest quality, look, and build, and you don't pay a penny extra for them.

Inspiration without slavish imitation

While the tube equipped Notre Dame and Regensburg Dom offer modern variations on the Neumann U 47 tube mic design, the Saint Jean Baptiste is Charles' take on the U 47 fet model (recently reintroduced—see February 2015 for that review, too).

All three mics fall into the "inspired by" category, rather than the clone category. In the case of the Saint Jean Baptiste, the mic's diameter and head basket are a match to the original. Everything else, inside and out, is a completely new design.



Back in February 2015, I had the pleasure of introducing our readers to mic maker Cathedral Pipes, thanks to a review of its glorious flagship tube condenser mic, the Notre Dame. Cathedral Pipes also sells the Regensburg Dom tube condenser and the Seville ribbon, but this month we're looking at its newest baby—the Saint Jean Baptiste, the first Cathedral Pipes FET condenser mic.

Cathedral Pipes microphones are handmade in California by Charles Dickinson. I'll say that again: when you order a Cathedral Pipes mic, Charles will build it for you, by hand. Keep that in mind as I walk you through what the Saint Jean Baptiste can do... and definitely keep it in mind when you see its price.

Well, ain't that shiny

Setting aside build and sound quality for just a moment, Cathedral Pipes microphones have three unique defining features that set them apart from most other boutique mic companies.

Inside: capsule and components

It all starts with the microphone's M7 capsule. Many current mics on the market use Asian capsules that are tuned and tweaked in the States (or used as is to save money). In contrast, the M7 capsule in all Cathedral Pipes condenser mics is handmade in the company's Orange County headquarters.

It is based on the original Gefell M7 design and is a center-terminated 32 mm dual diaphragm capsule. The diaphragms are made of 6-micron thick Mylar. They are 26.5 mm in diameter and are glued onto a single brass backplate.

Of course, the original U 47 fet used a K47 capsule, not an M7, so right off the bat there were some design differences that Charles needed

to wrestle with. According to the Cathedral Pipes website: "We wanted to use our own M7 inside the original design of the FET; however the polarization voltage drawn from the shared wimpy 48V phantom proved to be a challenge. We use a custom booster circuit to get around the issue and a current limiter to carefully portion out the current to each section of the design."

Internally the Saint Jean Baptiste is a brilliant balance of vintage craftsmanship and modern design. One side of the mic's circuit (the high-impedance portion) consists of point to point wiring and components like Wima MK4 and polystyrene capacitors, all attached to old-school ceramic rails. Literally on the flip side of said rails is a modern circuit board using surface-mount ICs and components. All of this flows to a large, weighty Cinemag CM-13101 output transformer.

Outside: checkmate!

The outside of the mic is dressed in an alternating checkerboard pattern of chrome squares and white enamel squares with the Cathedral Pipes family crest in the middle. All of this is protected by a lacquer coating to help with finger prints and discoloring.

The mic measures 7.75" by 2.25" and its chrome-plated triple mesh head basket is visually a match to that of a vintage U 47 fet. Inside this capsule are the small LEDs that glow beautifully in bluish-white light when the mic is fired up and receiving phantom power.

Outside the outside: the toolbox

The mic comes in a large red toolbox that is generously lined with thick gray foam, trimmed with a layer of red foam for looks. Like the Notre Dame, the Saint Jean Baptiste comes with a custom red and white Rycote Invision shockmount and a special custom-made red XLR cable.

This cable is also made in house by Charles out of OCC (Ohno Continuous Cast) copper wiring. As with an old-school vintage mic, the cable screws onto the microphone with a special Binder style 3-prong end. The kit finishes out with a cloth drawstring bag to hold the cable, which is secured inside the lid of the toolbox via tiny bungee cables. The only thing I think Charles should add to his mic packages is a polishing cloth to keep the mics shiny and fingerprint free.

Sound

The first thing I noticed about the Saint Jean Baptiste, despite it not being a spec-for-spec reissue or clone of a U 47 fet, is how close it actually gets to the sound of the original. In side-by-side tests it can trick the ear into thinking it is the real thing. However, upon more careful listening you will notice that the Saint Jean Baptiste has a nice hint of clearer modern highs as well as a touch more low end. It's a gently extended clean low end that you feel,

rather than just a big woofy bass boost. Overall this is a more modern, open variant of a U 47 fet. We are talking 5–10% difference, but it's there.

The Saint Jean Baptiste has a good smooth off-axis rejection. Its proximity effect is a bit more pronounced, almost like adding a hint of a sub to a monitoring system, thanks to the mic's slightly extended bass response. One last difference between it and an original/reissue U 47 fet is that it does exhibit a more pronounced low-end body resonance when tapped, than the almost zero resonance of the real thing.

In use

Let's get the obvious question out of the way first: can you use the Saint Jean Baptiste everywhere you'd use a real U 47 fet? Absolutely! It works fantastically on kick drum, guitar cabinet, brass, and—my personal favorite for this mic—bass cabinet.

I also had great luck with it on male vocals, and on the inside of a baby grand piano where I used it in tandem with Neumann's U 47 fet reissue. I had the original on the top end strings on the left and the Saint Jean Baptiste on the lows. Both mics worked so well together here that no one could tell that it was two different models and manufacturers.

But we won't stop there. Since it is just a hair more open on the top end, the Saint Jean Baptiste is slightly more versatile than the original. You can add acoustic guitar, shakers, tambourine, congas, and more to the list of things it records well. About the only place I did not like the Saint Jean Baptiste was on front of kit and on drum overheads, where it was too blunt and mid forward for my taste.

Overall, Charles did a fantastic job of voicing the Saint Jean Baptiste to the original and capturing its spirit. It's not a clone so much as a rethink and expansion of the U 47 fet's sound, purpose, and applications.

The bottom line

Remember how at the start of this review, I suggested that you keep in mind that this mic is hand-built to order when you see what it costs? It's not for the reason you might guess... not because this mic is extremely costly, but because it's unbelievably affordable.

Most mics of this ilk cost \$1800 and above, and that's without a case, shockmount, or cable. It blows my mind that Cathedral Pipes sells a completely handmade U 47 fet style mic with a non-sourced capsule and all the trimmings for way less than that, but I'm not complaining... and you shouldn't, either. If you want your own U 47 fet-flavored mic, the Saint Jean Baptiste needs to be at the very top of your "listen" list. ➡

Price: \$1300

More from: Cathedral Pipes,
www.cathedralpipes.com