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# REVIEW

## Pearlman Microphones TM-12A

*A new take on the other classic 12*

### REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

The TM-12A is the latest creation from Pearlman Microphones, and is inspired by the second-generation Austrian-designed AKG C12A. How does this differ from the better-known AKG C12, and how does the new take by owner Dave Pearlman fare in the modern studio? Read on.

### Pearlman and His Mics

Pearlman Microphones has an exceptionally respected following in the audio community. Rooted in the globally-sourced hybrid approach to mic design, instead of the "import-test-tweak" method, Pearlman Microphones takes off-the-shelf imported bodies and metalwork and stuffs them full of hand-assembled, high-end, often vintage new old stock (NOS) components, and custom capsules and transformers. Such is the case with the latest TM-12A, which utilizes a vintage design through and through.

### This Not That

When we think of the AKG C12, we think of the long-body, multi-pattern, large diaphragm tube microphone manufactured in Vienna from 1953–1963. One of the most famous mics in history!

The C12A was a second-generation version released in 1962. It was housed in a smaller, angular, trapezoidal body similar to the AKG C414 series.

The C12A retained its predecessor's coveted CK12 capsule but replaced its 6072 dual-triode glass tube circuit with a cathode follower design based around an RCA 7586 Nuovistor tube.

Designed in 1953, the sub-miniature Nuovistor was created to compete with early transistor technology.

Despite the shared capsule, the C12A exhibited a much different sound. Rather than the clear top-end and robust natural depth provided by the C12, the presence of the C12A was a bit more diffused with an airy top-end signature. It also had a slightly lower level, making it adept at higher SPL sources.

### The Pearlman TM-12A

The TM-12A uses a standard, imported 8.75" x 2" metal body and headbasket assembly identical to the Pearlman TM-2 microphone. It is finished in a vintage battleship gray with a matte black etched logo, head grille and end cap.

On the front are a pair of slide switches for selecting between the mics omni and cardioid polar patterns and a -10dB pad. According to Dave, this is the only real deviation in the circuit from the original C12A. Originally, the controls and polar patterns were found on the remote power supply, with the C12A offering an additional choice of Figure-8 with optional steps in between.

The TM-12A comes with an external

power supply, shock mount, cables and a vinyl pouch in an aluminum briefcase.

Please note that while the TM-12A power supply looks identical to those offered with other Pearlman tube mics, it is not interchangeable due to vastly different voltage requirements in the design.

### Inside

The capsule is an edge terminated 34mm brass-ring CK12-style capsule, handmade by Tim Campbell in Denmark. The cathode follower circuit features an authentic NOS 7586 Nuovistor tube and a USA-made, custom wound output transformer designed by David Geren at CineMag.

### Sounds

I reviewed the stunning ELA M 251-inspired TM-251 in February 2014. In September of that same year, I checked out the TM-47, a cardioid-only patterned microphone based on the classic Neumann U 47. Finally, we looked at the latest version of Dave's longest-standing microphone, the Pearlman TM-1 in October 2019, which is an affordable entry into the U 47 vibe. The Pearlman TM-12A sounds like none of the above.

### But is it C12-ish?

The C12 is a mic that I have been blessed to work with on multiple occasions.

I know it well and generally prefer it to the U 47 family of sound. Comparatively, the TM-12A does not have the opulent top-end; the rich, even tonality; or the depth of field offered by a true C12 or well-designed clone. To be fair, neither does a vintage C12A—so far, so good.

The TM-12A loves to be worked up close, where it reveals a very rich proximity effect. Moving an inch away from the capsule quickly opens the sound up and displays a broad, diffused tone that can indeed be described as airy. Overall, I find the TM-12A to sound like a relaxed AKG C414 (more accurately, a C414 EB). The balance of mid-range density and clarity remains, but the hard edges are gone. The best description I can give of the TM-12A is that it is sonically as if a vintage C414 took a deep breath and let out a big sigh.

## Uses

The TM-12A is a great choice on darn near anything acoustic in nature. It offers acoustic guitars, shakers, tamborine, drum overhead, front of kit, mandolin, congas and male vocals a full yet relaxed, airy sheen helps seat said sources easily in a mix.

Conversely, it would not be my first choice on anything needing to force its way through a mix, such as a guitar cabinet, kick drum, snare or screaming rock vocals. That said, I was surprised at how much I liked it on bass cabinet and floor tom in a pop-folk track (think James Taylor), where it helped those sources blend in rather than leap out at you.

One final thing to note on the vintage cathode follower design: the TM-12A, like the C12A does have a lower output than many modern mics. This means that the noise floor of the mic and your gear can be more apparent when pushing levels in quiet passages. It also means the TM-12A has excellent headroom and is quite happy up-close on loud sources.



## Final Thoughts

The TM-12A is Dave doing what he does best—taking an unassuming mic body and filling it with excellent vintage parts to impart a high-quality musical mojo.

The biggest crime of the original AKG C12A was in its name. Because it was not granted a new number to call its own (such as promoting it to C13), it was never given the fair shake it may have received with a different enumeration. Hopefully, the Pearlman TM-12A will help us re-think its sound and use in the modern mic locker. It's a pretty sweet sound, especially if you record acoustic instruments and percussion. ↪

**Price:** \$2,250

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