

ZT Custom Shop Jazz Club Amp

Clean Tones, Simple Design

ZT Amplifiers has built a reputation for delivering great things in small packages. With the release of its first Lunchbox in 2009, the company established a new standard in compact amplifier technology, delivering power and tone far beyond the product's modest size. Now, as part of its U.S.-built Custom Shop line, ZT has unveiled the Jazz Club amplifier, a 220-watt combo featuring loads of headroom and the ability to deliver the clean, uncolored tones that jazz guitarists crave.

Right from the start, ZT company founder Kenneth Kantor set the company on a mission to provide effective products that make musicians' lives easier. Portability, quality and ease of use were driving forces in the design of the Lunchbox line. Kantor, an audio engineer and MIT graduate with a background in developing innovative audio devices, wanted to build a small amp with the power to get over a drummer in a band. The Lunchbox line has been extremely well-received and eventually began to gain popularity among jazz players. Sensing an opportunity, ZT decided to create an amplifier specifically designed for jazz.

Like all models in the company's Custom Shop line, the Jazz Club is hand-built in ZT's lab in California using locally sourced components. According to Mike Kirschmann, ZT director of sales and marketing, "We wanted to utilize U.S.-made components, which allows us to have much more control and flexibility in manufacturing." Weighing 25 pounds and priced at \$1,299, the Jazz Club uses a custom-designed 12-inch speaker able to produce the low frequencies of an archtop guitar while remaining clean at high volumes. During the development process, ZT solicited feedback from several professional East Coast jazz guitar players, who served as beta-testers for the amp. East Coast players have a real need for professional-grade portable gear, since it's common for them to travel to gigs on public transportation or in taxis.

The Jazz Club has a simple, yet attractive, design, and the cabinet is coated with an extremely durable, industrial-grade, scratch-resistant blue coating that should stand up nicely to the road. It has a basic cube design with an easy-access, top-mounted control panel and a durable metal speaker grille. The control panel offers pre-amp gain, bass, mid, treble, volume and reverb control—just enough to get the job done, and no more. "Simplicity has always been our thing, because we want

players to be able to get their sound quickly and easily, without messing around with an overabundance of controls," Kirschmann said. On the rear, there's an XLR DI out and an output for connecting an external speaker cabinet. A mute function allows players to keep the internal speaker active or switched off when using the second cabinet. There is also an effects loop for using outboard pedals and processors with minimal noise and signal degradation.

I really appreciate simplicity in a jazz amp, and the Jazz Club gives me just that. Although its controls are minimal, the amp can achieve a wide range of tones—clean tones, the ones that count for jazz, and not distortion or unneeded DSP effects. The pots are nice and sensitive with a wide sweep, allowing you to tweak your tone and dial it in to your satisfaction. The 220-watt class-D amp runs completely cool and is more than powerful enough to pump out clear notes at higher volumes with minimal discoloration. I found this to be the case with a variety of guitars, including fully-hollow, semi-hollow and solidbody. This leads me to believe that the Jazz Club would be a nice all-around option for players of non-jazz styles, and it would serve as a great starting point for guitarists who wish to tailor their sound by adding various DSP effects and stomp boxes to the signal chain.

—Keith Baumann

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