

TAPE OP

Milab Microphones: VIP-60

REVIEWED BY DAN KNOBLER

The new Milab VIP-60 large diaphragm condenser mic is marketed as an update to its flagship VIP-50, but in all honesty, I had never heard of, seen, or used its predecessor. It's quite refreshing to pick up a well-built microphone with no preconceptions. The VIP-60 has a unique design – think '80s walkie-talkie in a metallic finish with three easy-to-use circular switches for polar pattern, low frequency roll-off, and pad. The slightly slanted grill makes the whole thing look like an obelisk in the skyline of Blade Runner.

Milab Microphones emerged as a split-off company from Sweden's Pearl Microphone Labs (PML), whose founder spearheaded the use of rectangular-shaped capsules in the mid-'80s. I put this microphone to use right away in the studio without reading any of the marketing material. It's been a while since I've used a modern mic that wasn't a clone of some vintage design, and it's nice not to have my expectations biased by comparisons to "the real deal." I began my testing with the VIP-60 on Rodney Crowell's voice. He has used a Fred Cameron (Cameron Labs) tube-modified Neumann U 87 for many years, but on this session the vocals were only a guide, so we used this as an opportunity to try something new. The VIP-60 excelled. It was clear and full-bodied – articulate but not harsh. It certainly has a very clean top end presence and sounds wonderful soloed. Though it didn't necessarily cut through the mix the way a tube mic sometimes does, on a rollicking, blues-infused tune the VIP-60 drove a vintage tube mic preamp to beautiful saturation... and I heard no overloading of the capsule, even without the input pad engaged!

On another tune, I moved it over to complement a vintage ribbon about eight inches in front of Jedd Hughes' low-watt Oahu Valco/Supro guitar amp. The VIP-60 provided an accurate picture of the amp, and surprisingly, it had more low end heft than the ribbon mic. However, something about the ribbon felt like a classic record, whereas the VIP-60 felt like a really nice-sounding electric guitar. In every acoustic guitar application I tried – fingerpicked nylon string, wide strummed Jeff Lynne [Tape Op [#92](#)] rhythm, single-note lines – the VIP-60 sounded fantastic – full-bodied with a clear definition and quick-but-smooth transient response. I imagine a pair would be superb on piano or as drum overheads.

My favorite surprise was using the Milab VIP-60 on upright bass. The sound was perfectly balanced, with enough meat in the low end to anchor the track – no woofy low mid resonance, with an excellent crisp capture of bassist Jon Estes' backbeat slaps. I blended that with a modern active ribbon mic for a bit of that gauzy ribbon midrange and was quite

pleased with the sound. I had the bass behind two large gobos playing along with a fairly loud percussionist in the room, and the rejection from the VIP-60 in cardioid was enough to keep everything isolated.

The form factor of the VIP-60 is definitely unique. I dig the overall look and feel and love that it reminds me of my mom's first Motorola cell phone circa 1990. It comes with a Rycote InVision USM [Tape Op [#84](#)] shock mount that attaches to the mic with four screws, similar to a Christmas tree stand. Also included is a sturdy SKB waterproof case. My one criticism is that the only high-pass filter options are 200 or 500 Hz, which seem extreme for most sources. However, sonically the Milab VIP-60 is top-notch, particularly if you're looking for a clean and neutral capture that leans a bit towards the warmer side of the spectrum. Matched pairs available.

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Tape Op #149