

A new technology yields a surprising advance in performance



review

MXL V6

SILICON VALVE MICROPHONE

BY PAUL VNUK

MXL has spent the past few years creating a line of budget microphones, and while the words “made in China” are often responsible for heated debates among engineers, musicians and, yes, magazine reviewers, microphones of Chinese descent are starting to move beyond cheap imitation into genuine innovation.

The MXL V6 microphone from Marshall Electronics may be one such mic. The V6 is the first of a new series dubbed the Silicon Valve Series, designed and manufactured in Marshall’s plant in California using imported components. The focus of this series is “Vintage Tube Mic Emulation”.

What it is

The V6 is a large-diaphragm FET-based cardioid condenser microphone with a diaphragm that we measured to be 1.25" in diameter. Inside the microphone is a balanced transistor circuit stated to perform in a manner similar to a tube—specifically the tube in Marshall’s MXL V69 Mogami Edition tube mic (reviewed September 2003). The V6 requires phantom power to operate. It can be mounted with any compression shock mount and is also internally threaded for mounting on a small ring-style mic holder.

Always make a good first impression

The MXL V6 looks simply classy. The body is a brushed gray-green gunmetal color with a 24-carat gold plated ring and grille. The build feels thick and solid and measures a little over 8" long and 2" in diameter. While the end result in any studio is always “sound”, looks also play an important role, and the V6 looks impressive.

I received two of these mics for review shortly after their NAMM premiere. They arrived with no frills and no documentation in standard vinyl pouches with a set of MXL shock mounts. MXL informs us that when full production begins, the mics will be shipped in wooden cases with full documentation.

Tests on drums and percussion

The V6 has a very warm tone and extremely low noise floor. Its low-end response is big and full, its midrange is warm but understated, and it has a smooth top end.

I evaluated the V6 on a variety of sources and instances and here are the results.

The first session was a percussion sampling session. After auditioning various mics I set up the V6 (which fits quite snugly in its included shock mount) and proceed to try everything from Tibetan bowls, jangling dog tags, metal water drums, seed pods, and shakers—in each case the V6 fared well. The jangled aluminum dog tags showed off the V6's tendency to smooth the otherwise harsh metallic transients.

Since I had two V6s we set them up in a couple of different stereo configurations, wide & Blumlein, and I was again pleased with the results. The consistency between the two mics was great, with no noticeable discrepancies in tone or volume. Because of the V6's low noise floor we were able to successfully capture some very quiet and delicate percussion parts with a nice stereo image.

On full drum kit the results were mixed. I was not impressed with the V6

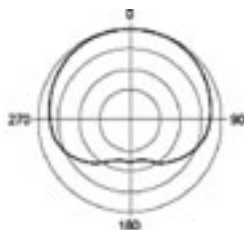
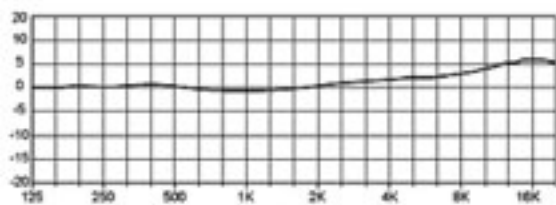
on this Martin the V6 captured the guitar with a tone so full and natural that no eq was needed during tracking or mixdown—awesome!

On the male singer the V6 was not bad and would have been usable with some eq tweaking, but ultimately we chose to go with a more open-sounding “bottle” type mic. The V6 added just a little too much of a velvety sheen to the voice for this track.

Alto sax was the last thing I tried the V6 on, and again it performed well on intimate, quiet parts, but was not my ultimate choice with more aggressive playing, or as a distance mic.

Faux Tube VS Tube

So does the V6 sound like a vintage tube mic? This could be an endless and winnerless debate, as it is very subjective and few of us actually have access to full-blown vintage tube gear.



Frequency Response and Polar Pattern graphs (courtesy MXLmics.com)

sound on overheads—it dulled the sound of the cymbals, and did not let the highs breathe as much as I like; however, when used as close mics on a brushed snare, toms, and a ride cymbal, they reminded me of Ed Thigpen's sound on the now classic *Night Train* album. Meaning that the sound was so up close, warm and pleasant it was sublime, although positioning the V6's axis with respect to the ride cymbal was important so as to minimize excessive low-mid build up.

Guitars, vocals, and brass

A week later I threw the V6 in front of a boutique 12" guitar amp (both clean and heavily overdriven) and again had mixed results. By itself the V6 made the amp sound too full with not enough midrange punch and it was hard to set in the mix. When blended with a standard SM57 the sound became absolutely heavy and huge. The two mics complemented each other well, and the guitarist was very impressed with how heavy these guitar takes turned out.

On a folksy “Neil Youngish” session I used the V6 on male vocals and on a large Martin Dreadnought guitar. Recording acoustics is one of my passions so I was anxious to try the V6. While no two acoustics are the same,

My most-used tube mic is an Audio Technica 4060 (not vintage) and while they share some characteristics such as warm detailed lows, the V6 is duller on the high end and not as open-sounding. Of course the 4060 also costs three times as much as the V6, so I was not disappointed—they are just different mics for different sources.

The final decision

Whether it emulates a vintage tube mic or not, the V6 is a useful microphone in its own right. The V6 sounded like nothing else in my current mic cabinet and while it was not perfectly suited for everything, what I liked it on, I loved it on! Classy looks and classy sound. 🎧

Price: \$399.95; MXL 57 shockmount, \$49.95

More from: MXL Microphones/ Marshall Electronics, 1910 E. Maple Ave., El Segundo, CA 90245. 310/333-0606, www.mxlamics.com.

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