

Violet Global Pre

The interchangeable capsule on a large capacitor body is among the oldest of microphone images yet it is still carried through today. **JON THORNTON** reports on a Latvian contender and swaps some cardioid heads.

The concept of large diaphragm capacitor microphones with interchangeable capsules is certainly not a new one — the more assiduous microphone history buff, will doubtless recall that the first mass-produced capacitor design is generally acknowledged to be Neumann's CMV-3, introduced in 1928. Better known as the 'Neumann Bottle', a later variant, the CMV3-A, introduced interchangeable capsule assemblies featuring different polar patterns. The 'Bottle' form factor has also remained a feature of some modern takes on the concept.

For some reason though, modern and vintage variants seem to be mostly based around valve electronics (out of necessity in the case of older designs, but a design choice for the modern ones), and also tend to be fairly substantial in terms of heft (the original CMV 3 weighed in at nearly 3kg). Given the variety of compact, small diaphragm capacitor microphones with interchangeable capsules available, this seems a strange state of affairs — albeit with some rare exceptions such as Korby's Convertible.

Violet Designs obviously drew the same conclusions, which accounts for its Global Pre and VIN series capsules. What you get here is a compact powering and amplifier module featuring discrete Class-A electronics and a transformerless output stage. Imagine a conventional bottle design that's been concentrated to about a tenth of its normal height and you're pretty close to how it looks (*Or just look at the photos. Ed*). Everything is finished in black, and for a company usually associated with striking physical designs, it's all quite conservative. Even the included mount is restrained in this respect, limiting itself to some violet (naturally) coloured squashy bushes, which afford some degree of elastic suspension. The base of the Global Pre fits snugly into this, and is held securely by tightening a small thumbscrew — slackening this off also allows the Global Pre to be rotated within the mount if desired.

The conservative looks of the Global Pre are mitigated somewhat when a capsule is mounted. The mounting system itself is a push and turn bayonet arrangement, and is compatible not only with the VIN series capsules, but also with the vintage Neumann M series capsules originally designed for the CMV3A, whose post-war manufacture continued in one way or another by Gefell. Eight different VIN series capsules are available — six of these are cardioids, one omni and one fig-8. Of these

eight, only four were supplied for the review, all cardioids. The model numbers for three of them immediately suggest their inspirations, carrying the designations VIN12, VIN67 and VIN89 — the accompanying literature suggests that they sound similar to a C12, U67 and U89 respectively. The fourth, designated VIN27 offers no direct comparison, but instead is simply described as 'natural sounding'.

All of the capsules ship in their own protective wooden case, and while in transit or storage the diaphragm suspension is locked in place with three thumb-screws that need removing before use. Visually, there's very little to distinguish the different capsules as all of them have a two-part grille with a shiny side and a matte side — shiny side indicates the on-axis direction. The only thing to distinguish each of the capsules is an engraved model number on the base of the bayonet fitting, which is slightly annoyingly obscured when the capsule is mated with the Global Pre.

There's no indication in the literature as to whether the capsules can be 'hot-swapped' or not so erring on the safe side I elected to power down the Global Pre each time I swapped a capsule around. This worked fine most of the time, although there was an issue with one of the capsules (VIN12) that would refuse to power up correctly and give anything but the tiniest output. This was corrected by going through a procedure of powering down, removing and replacing the capsule and powering up again — a few cycles of this and it sprung to life.

In comparing the different capsules on offer, it's obvious with this sort of exchangeable design that any tonal differences are going to be entirely attributable to the capsule design and tuning. This might lead you to think that any differences are extremely subtle but this is definitely not the case here.

Starting with the VIN12 capsule, and the sound is a combination of a significant bump in the LF response coupled with a slightly bright HF response. This sounds initially flattering on vocals but after a while begins to sound just a touch too 'scooped', as the mid range is lacking something in terms of detail. For a cardioid capsule, the VIN12 also seems to have pretty poor off-axis attenuation levels.

Moving on to the VIN27, and there's far less in the way of a LF bump, and a slightly softer, less 'hyped' response in the high frequencies, coupled with what sounds like a very slight but wide mid presence boost around the 2k-6k region. Off-axis attenuation is much improved here, and of all the capsules in the review this is the most open and natural sounding. Less impressive is the VIN89, which sounds incredibly dark — all LF and low mid, with an HF response that seems to start falling

away above about 7k or so. It's noticeably noisier than the other capsules too and when you add in the not inconsiderable proximity effect I'd say that it's bordering on being so dark as to be of limited use in some applications.

The VIN67 gets things back on track with a tonality that majors on pulling out the high-mid band with a gentle HF roll-off. A nice smooth off-axis response and good rear rejection also means that of all of the capsules, this is the one that seems most comfortable working at a distance from source.

Working with all the capsules with male and female vocals, acoustic guitar and congas as source material proved that the ability to swap capsules around quickly makes for some improvements in workflow — and positively encourages experimentation and change when you might otherwise settle for something that was simply OK. It also drew out some clear favourites from the capsules on offer. The winner here, to my ears, is the VIN27 as it sounds great on guitar and works well with all but the thinnest of voices. The VIN12 can sound immediately satisfying on most sources too — at first listen there is a great similarity to the C12 that it's attempting to emulate, but is ultimately lacking in the mid-range smoothness of that classic microphone. Nevertheless, it has a definite character which, particularly on some female vocals, gives a very useable sound in a modern mix.

The VIN67 proved strongest when applied to percussion as it works well with a little space between it and the source and seems to pull out transient detail a little better than the others. But I was never really convinced by the VIN89.

So, what you get here is a system that offers a quite astonishing range of different tonal characteristics with the capsules on offer, plus the ability to interface with vintage capsules that share the same mount. For the money, though, you need to weigh up whether the price of the Global Pre plus at least one capsule justifies the advantage of being able to swap things around quickly. If it does, you really need to listen carefully to each of the capsules to decide what best fits your needs. ■



PROS

Quick and easy change of mic characteristics; range of tonalities on offer; VIN27 in particular is a very useful sounding capsule; ability to use 'M' series capsules.

CONS

Build quality is more functional than elegant; some problems with powering up correctly.

EXTRAS

Prices without VAT are: GLP Euro 495; VIN12, VIN26, VIN27, VIN44, and VIN55 Euro 650 each; VIN47 and VIN67 Euro 695 each.



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