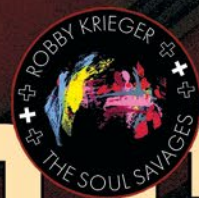


Robby Krieger Interview—Savage Soul on Love Street



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Pearl ELM-T BM Signature Edition

Classy smooth sound abounds in this rectangular capsuled tube mic

REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Established in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1941, Pearl Microphone Laboratories is best known for its unique rectangular mic diaphragm, designed by company founder, Rune Rosander, in the 1950s. This design has remained at the heart of almost every large-diaphragm Pearl (and Milab) mic ever since. Today, we are looking at the company's latest vacuum tube offering, the Bernt Malmqvist-designed Pearl ELM-T BM Signature Edition.

Big Rectangles

The roots of the ELM-T date back to the early 2000s when mic designer Bernt Malmqvist began to tinker with and extend Rune's long-standing 2:1 rectangular capsule offering—(approximately 1.5" x .5") to a 7:1 ratio (approximately 2.5" x .5"). This design resulted in a distinctly narrower vertical and extended horizontal pickup pattern. Thus, the mic could be better positioned to reject reflections from the floor and ceiling while retaining a sizeable natural width.

The ELM-Evolution

The resulting Pearl ELM series offered three models: the cardioid ELM-C, the bidirectional (Fig.-8) ELM-B and the dual-output (front and back capsule) ELM-A.

I reviewed the Pearl ELM-C in September 2014, and I have also reviewed multiple Milab offerings over the years, including the DC-96B and DC-96C models in June 2012 and the Milab VIP-60 in February 2022.

The Bernt Malmqvist Signature Microphone

After 63 years, Bernt Malmqvist sold

Pearl to Milab in 2017, reuniting both companies. However, he stayed on as a consultant until recently. In 2019 he began crafting his multipattern ELM-T BM Signature Edition tube mic and had working prototypes by 2022.

The cylindrical Rolex green ELM-T measures 9.38" long with a 1.75" diameter fitted with a 1.25" badge. Behind the open mesh grille is the famed 7:1 rectangular mic capsule.

A special note needs to be made of the miniature snap-in multi-pin connector on the bottom of the mic (see photo)—there is virtually zero chance of bent pins or mis-threading.

The amplifier design dates back to the late 1950s and is a true tube design with no solid-state components. According to Bernt, he started with the schematics from a Pearl 8CK as his first draft. The mic uses a 6N3P-E vacuum tube and a Lundahl LL1150 output transformer.

Power and Accessories

The external classic-styled Andreas Grosser AGES NG power supply sports impeccable build quality. The fully variable 41-position pattern selector is of

particular note, gently detented for easy and precise recall.

You also get a satin mic slipcover, a 10-meter mic cable, a Rycote USM shock mount, a power cable, an individual test chart, a manual and a signed letter from Bernt Malmqvist. All of these fit in a robust 18" (W) x 16" (D) x 6.25" (T) anvil-style carrying case.

Specs and Sound

The ELM-T has a frequency response of 20 Hz to 25,000 Hz, a Max SPL of 126dB, a Sensitivity of 12 mV/Pa (± 1 dB) and an A-weighted noise level of 16dBA.

Its frequency chart shows it to be a generally flat mic with just a hint of 1dB bloom in the low end from 30 Hz to 70 Hz, an equally gentle 1dB dip from 100 Hz to 225 Hz, a flat response up to 4 kHz followed by a fast, sharp 2dB dip at 7.5 kHz and a minimal .5dB rise from 10 kHz to 18 kHz. In Omni mode, the mic stays flat from 20 Hz to 3.5 kHz with a -4dB cut from 3.5 kHz to 9 kHz followed by a 2dB boost from 10 kHz to 20 kHz.

All of the above translates to an exceptionally smooth mic coupled with rich, full sound.



In Action

The ELM-T is designed to favor acoustic instruments like cello, viola, violin, acoustic guitar and mandolin. It can be used as a spot mic or a mono-section mic. I am sure it would be amazing in stereo if one was well-heeled enough to snag a pair.

So far, the above makes it quite similar to the ELM-C in overall use; however, when comparing it to recordings I made during my ELM-C review, I would say that the ELM-T is a bit rounder and richer on top than its solid-state sibling. In my ELM-C review, I called that mic "ribbon-like" in its sonic capture, making the ELM-T even more so, although still not quite as rounded nor dark as some ribbon mics.

I experimented with the ELM-T in various scenarios: as a mono drum overhead and as a front of kit mic (which yields an excellent focused drum capture), as a general room mic, positioned on electric guitar cabinet, and for recording percussion and vocals. While this is not a mic I would grab if I were after a sparkly bright top-end or a forward upper mid-thrust, its smooth, rich, balanced nature can work well on any source.

Proximity, Patterns and Axis

Its proximity effect is bold and full. While it tapers off at about 6" away, the mic retains a natural fullness even at a distance of 6 to 10'. On most sources, I found 3" to be the sweet spot for a rich, clean yet

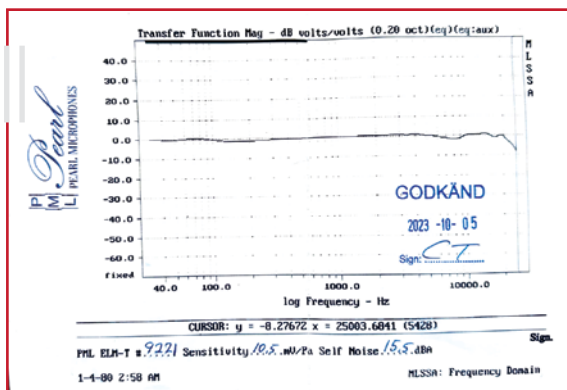
intimate sound, but again, using the mic at greater distances should not be ignored.

Moving through the polar patterns helps dial in the sound, and I will say that it has one of the richest, non-sibilant Omni pattern pickups I have heard in a large diaphragm mic to date.

The side off-axis rejection is smooth, fast and natural. However, as you move out of the capsule's vertical plane, especially its top axis, the sound rolls off in a very dark, rounded way.

This is great because it can help ignore upper and lower room reflections and errant breaths from acoustic guitar players, cellists and the like. It also means that when positioning the mic on a vocalist, you will want them singing into the center of the diaphragm and not above or below. Finally, speaking of singers or any source that moves quick puffs of air, I would recommend a good pop filter.

I also tried the Pearl ELM-T alongside a Neumann M49V, an AKG C12VR and a Manley Labs Reference Silver, and it was able to hang with all of them in quality, sonics and depth of field while nicely offering a distinct new "flavor" of its own.



Wrap Up

With the ELM-T BM Signature Edition, Pearl and Bernt Malmqvist have done the rare feat of crafting a new boutique-level tube mic with its own sweet sound that more than does its Swedish heritage proud and does so in its own unique way. ➡

Price: \$5,605

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