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### GET ON YOUR MARKS...

# DAKING 52 270H + MILLENNIA HV3C + ADL600

The boys at Jam Free Studios mix, match, mix and match and match and mix and wonder if the ADL/Presonus unit is all it's cracked up to be.

by Jay Matheson

Like everyone else I'm always interested when a promising new mic preamp hits the market, especially a class A tube preamp built in the USA. When I found out that our next door neighbor, Front End Audio had a demo unit available of the Presonus/Anthony DeMaria Labs collaboration ADL600 2-channel mic pre/DI, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to try it out. We were so impressed by this unique piece that we decided to have a proper shoot-out with some of our tried and true "go to" preamps.

Over the years I've seen lots of ADL gear in studios and for sale, but I've never gotten my hands on any. And I'd previously not had any experience with Presonus gear either so this was going to be my first experience with both companies. When the Front End guys dropped off the unit, the first thing I noticed was how hefty it was. It seemed to be built like a tank. The top of the unit is vented, which allows a look inside where the six tubes and neatly designed circuits reside. The chassis is sturdy and the thick front panel is covered with heavy-duty switches for pad, polarity reverse, HP filter, and 48v phantom power.

The unit has large aluminum knobs for gain and trim with smaller ones for selection of HP filter frequencies and input impedance/front panel instrument input/mix input switch. The knobs feel nice and sturdy and look quite nice to boot. The metering on the unit is especially nice with both VU and blue LED meters. The blue lights over each switch were a nice aesthetic touch. They were strangely calming in contrast to the traditional red lights blazing everywhere else in the control room. ADL/Presonus went out of their way to make

a classy looking front panel for this unit. When I put it in my rack it made some of the other gear appear cheap.

The pre's main features are its 73dB of gain, class A with no ICs in the signal path, selectable microphone impedance, and switchable HP filter. The rest of the specs are available on the manufacturer's site. There's no need to reprint them all here since what we all really want to know is "How Does It Sound?"

For our test setup we brought in a studio drummer, bassist, vocalist, and guitarist. We used our Daking 52 270H and a borrowed Millennia HV3C preamp for comparison to the ADL600. We ran the output of the preamps into our Digi 192 interface and monitored through a Briston 4B and a pair of Tannoy DMT 101s. A total of four engineers were present to listen to the results.

Our first test was with drum overheads using a pair of Neumann KM100s and a rock drummer with a standard 4-piece Ludwig kit.

The ADL600 delivers a very "big" sound. The low end was so well represented that a kick mic could have been optional here. The cymbals are smooth in response with no frequencies standing out as being accented. The detail is much better than what most people shopping for a tube preamp might expect. Transient response is very natural sounding, not overly fast or slow. The ADL delivers a deep, 3D sound on overheads.

**By Comparison:** The Millennia delivered a bit more detail overall than the ADL600. The depth was comparable, but the low end was definitely not there. Also, the Millennia



seemed a bit boxy by comparison.

The Daking delivered a bright and present sound, excellent transient response, and good "cut." It was a bit 2D by comparison, keeping more of the high and upper mid response up top more than the others. The low-end response was not as full as the ADL600.

On a kick drum using a D112 during the same session, all three preamps delivered varying results consistent with our overhead tests. The ADL600 was huge sounding again with a slightly smoothed attack, the Millennia with good transient detail and less low-end response and somewhat boxy, and the Daking for the accent on "cut" and sounding more aggressive and present.

On a snare drum using an SM57 on top, the ADL600 exhibited a slightly smoothed out attack, same large image and depth. The Millennia was very midrange present and detailed with a somewhat faster transient response, while the Daking delivered out and presence for days and accented that upper mid/high end response.

**Our second test was on an acoustic guitar with a vintage KM184 pointed where the neck meets the body from about 12" out.**

The ADL600 again delivered a big 3D image in the monitors, extended low end and smooth midrange, with good detail and harmonic content. The highs were somewhat sparkly in

this application; overall, if acoustic guitar were featured in a song and required a large sound, the ADL600 will easily get the job done.

**By Comparison:** The Millennia came in with the most detail, very decent harmonic content as well, and again a slightly boxy sound in the low/mid-mids.

The Daking again gives us that aggressive cut, very present high end and accented attack sound, and is 2D by comparison. It's a great track if you need cut in a dense mix.

**Our third test was with vocals, a local rock/blues based session singer on a Neumann U87 from about 8" out using a pop filter.**

The ADL600 was described by all in the room as "warm" or robust sounding, capable of delivering a full low end without being wooly. The cut and presence was nice too, again with no noticeable peaks in frequency response and a natural big image. For a featured vocal track where size matters, the ADL600 will get the gig every time.

**By Comparison:** The Millennia staggered. It delivered a sort of flattened out, nasally sound. There was definitely some more mid presence in an area that would require some EQ adjustment during a mix on this singer.

The Daking preamp again proved that it's the call for cut and bright response. It was a little "essy" in the high end with this singer. With all of that upper end response rising to the top the image was again somewhat 2D.

**Our fourth test was using the DI section of the ADL600 on a bass guitar, a Fender P played up and down the scale.**

The ADL600 is again a good box to call on for deep lows, even response throughout the frequency spectrum, and a somewhat smoothed out response. Playing up and down the scale we heard an extremely even response no matter how high or low we reached. The ADL600 is giving back everything you give it, and effortlessly rolling out low end for a huge bass track. There was a ton of gain available as well, and turning down the output of the ADL600 and cranking up the input a bit could net some more flavorful results if desired and harmonic content driving the tubes a bit.

We were not able to compare the DI to the Millennia and Daking as they do not possess dedicated DI sections.

**In conclusion:** We were quite impressed by the performance of the unit overall. It performed well on overheads, kick, snare, electric bass, male vocals, and acoustic guitar. Since the test I've also used the unit during sessions for electric guitar and female vocals with excellent results. It's become my go-to drum overhead pre. Turning down the output and using hotter gain settings can net some nice subtle drive from the tubes and pushed harmonic content. The unit also has separate line level inputs, allowing warming of digital sources if desired. It looks like I'm going to have to sell off one of my other tube preamps because after trying this one out for a month there's no way they'll ever get it back from me. The ADL600 delivers on many sonic levels from detailed to 3D, and when I need a BIG track there's a new sheriff in town. ☐☐

