

Tape Op GEAR REVIEWS



Daking Mic Pre One

We have a Daking console here at The Hangar and a pair of his FET compressors that see near constant use, so when Geoff Daking and Brad Lunde at TransAudio Group offered to send us a pair of Mic Pre One preamps to try out, we jumped at the opportunity to use and hear them. We were in the middle of a bunch of location recordings, the first of which was Devendra Banhart's next record. Here's what engineer Bryce Gonzales had to say about them after using them on Dev's record for a few weeks. -JB

The *Mic Pre One* is a single-channel mic preamp and DI employing the same fully-discrete, Class A electronics and transformer-balanced input that Geoff Daking uses in his consoles and other outboard preamps. Its design is based on the classic Trident A-Range console. It has everything you would expect from a modern mic preamp: 20 dB pad, 48V phantom power, full LED metering, and a 1/4" instrument input. It is small, with an external inline power supply, and it comes in an aluminum box that could be run over with a truck. I wouldn't worry at all about tossing this preamp into a backpack full of cables. Opening up and looking inside the unit, you can see the clean layout and the same Jensen input transformer evident in the console channels. Sometimes it seems like new products from established boutique companies are made cheaper by cutting corners on parts and construction, so it's nice to see that this is not the case here.

Moving beyond the standard features, the *Mic Pre One* has a unique feature not found on most preamps, a variable high-pass filter from 0-200 Hz. This sounded cool enough, but I didn't really fully grasp it until Geoff gave a demonstration during the Audio Underground Roadshow held at The Hangar last year. Have you ever been working on a track or a mix, focusing on the bass, the mids, and the highs, and then looked at the monitors to see the woofers moving sporadically in the 10-30 Hz range? And I mean really moving! Sometimes you might hear some low-end pop from a vocal, but most of the time, you can't even hear this as your monitors can't reproduce it, and it's on your tracks using up a lot of voltage and making things like compressors act and sound funny. Geoff demonstrated this by placing a tube mic out in our tracking room, plugged into the *Mic Pre One* and straight into Pro Tools. He turned the preamp up, and we all watched the woofers start to move with sub-low frequencies—floor noise and small amounts of air pressure in the room. Even when people were 20-30 ft away, the floor still seemed to transfer some low frequency movement. Tape decks can't record these sub-lows as well as digital recorders can, so years ago, this was not something to worry too much about; although that's not to say people haven't used high-pass filters in the past for this very problem—tape or not.

But when you do use a high-pass filter, you don't always want to cut off everything below 80 or 100 Hz. This is where the Daking preamp comes in handy. As Geoff showed us, you can solo your track, ride the high-pass filter up, and at some point, you'll hear some of the low end start to go away. Right at this point when you hear the filter kick in, back it down a few Hz. That's it—the filter is doing its job without affecting the sound of what you want to capture. We all took a look at the monitors, and sure enough, the woofers were not kicking in and out looking like they were about to blow, and our vocal still sounded full with nice low end.

So when we were packing up to do a remote recording for the new Devendra Banhart record in a cabin near the Pacific Ocean, Geoff sent us out a pair of the new preamps, and I was stoked to put this high-pass thing into action. Tech talk aside, how does the preamp sound? The *Mic Pre One* sounds really good. We took up a slew of preamps, including our 1940s RCA console as well as Universal Audio and Neve-style channels. The Dakings had the same clean, clear sound as the console preamps that I've grown used to using in our studio here, with a nice high-end bite. The producer on this record, Paul Butler, along with JB and I, started to go through what chain to use on which instruments. Paul said he didn't like crazy amounts of bass on the bass guitar, knowing our studio bass amp, an Ampeg B-15, has tons of low bass, and the AKG C 414 on it would pick it all up. The Daking was a great choice. We listened to the bass and set the high-pass to around 30-40 Hz. The bass sound was all of the sudden sitting in the mix much better, and we still had plenty of low end, but it wasn't out of control.

We put the other Daking on a guitar amp mic'd up with a Cascade ribbon in the bathroom. The cabin was small and the bass amp and drums were set up only feet away in the other room. With the guitar amp at a low volume, and the floor bouncing and vibrating away, the high-pass filter again worked great; at around 50 Hz, any drum and bass noise coming through the floor was cut to a minimum. This was the same case when tracking Devendra's acoustic guitar in the bedroom with the full band in the other room. Only having a few mic preamp channels with EQ, I was a little worried about not having enough tone control, but the Dakings didn't need it, having a nicely balanced tone on everything we put them on, and they handled all the different types of mics well. They also had a good amount of gain, even with a ribbon hung from the top of the three-story cabin for a room mic.

Also, the high-pass filter is a smooth, second-order, 12 dB per octave filter, allowing it to be used in a different way than Geoff had explained it to me. As the session in the cabin progressed, I started to try the *Mic Pre One* on other things. One guitar amp track sounded nice but had a ton of bass. With no other mics or guitars or amps, my first thought was, what channel do I have with EQ that I'm not using? None. So I gave the Daking a try, and I cranked up the high-pass to around 130 Hz, and it sounded great! Just what I was looking to do with an EQ. Later, I started to ride the high-pass up higher on things I didn't want much bass on. At the beginning of the session, I was excited to use all our vintage and new tube preamps, but the Dakings ended up being an important, useful sound amongst all the gear we had. We used at least one Daking on every song on the record. -Bryce Gonzales

When Devendra finished up his record, we had another location recording starting a week later with engineer Robert Cheek and the band Two Sheds, whose lead vocalist is also *Tape Op's* Copy Editor! Here's what Robert had to say. -JB

For tracking Two Sheds, I had a decent collection of mics: a nice Soundelux U99 (*Tape Op* #17), a pair of ADK small-diaphragm condensers, a few Shure SM57s, and three of the

new ribbon mics from Cascade. For mic preamps, I had a pair of Chameleon Labs 7602s (#51), a Universal Audio 6176 (#35), and a pair of the new Daking *Mic Pre Ones*. I have been using the 7602s for a couple of years now and love them. I went back and forth between those and the Dakings, however, and ended up using the Dakings on most of the project. I've always been very particular about finding the right preamp to complement ribbon mics, and the Dakings were great. They had plenty of gain and a nice subtle color. The 7602s seemed a bit sterile in comparison. My hands-down favorite feature was the sweepable high-pass filter; it came in very handy while tracking acoustic guitars and vocals. I find that on the 7602, I often can't decide on the right filter setting, and it was great to be able to sweep right up to the frequency I wanted. -Robert Cheek

And finally, Scott McChane, *Tape Op's* Assistant Gear Geek and prepress guru had a session tracking a string quartet in a church, so we gave the Dakings one more road test. Here are Scott's thoughts. -JB

On a recent remote recording I did, versatility, portability and durability proved to be key reasons why the Dakings saw more action than the rest of the preamps I'd brought. The location was a small chapel converted to a residential home—just the right kind of ambience for a string quartet. My setup was simple—a stereo ribbon mic above the quartet, two omni room mics, and a few spot mics on the cello and viola. Originally, I'd planned to use a pair of Grace Design m101 preamps (*Tape Op* #68) with the omnis, but the Dakings proved to be a better match in this instance. The *Mic Pre One* was well-suited to handle the bit of street noise from outside with its variable hi-pass filter set at about 100 Hz. Also, I found the Daking gave me the touch of color I was missing from the super-accurate Grace preamps, which seemed to be a better fit for the ribbon mics anyway. And finally, despite being in a fairly nice part of town, the durability and weight of the unit instilled in me a feeling of safety when loading out at night. I could see that I'd really have to make an effort to break these. If assaulted, the *Mic Pre One's* hefty enclosure could surely stop most small-caliber bullets. One might also use the durable power supply cord as a sling mechanism to propel the unit into the faces of would be attackers. In all seriousness, whether you entrust your life to the unit's capabilities as a defensive weapon or not, it's clear that you can entrust your reputation as a discerning recordist to the *Mic Pre One's* sonic capabilities.

(\$675 street; www.daking.com)

-Scott McChane, www.scottmcchane.com

Buzz Audio REQ-2.2 Resonance Equalizer

I recently sold my beloved solid-state Pultec EQP-1A3 equalizers, so I was in the market for a new unit to fill the empty void left in my mastering rig. Unlike my old Pultec program equalizers, this time I wanted something with more surgical precision to it. If at all possible, I wanted something with a bit of that Pultec "musical mojo" as well. Perusing the specs of the REQ-2.2, it looked like this unit might just be what I was looking for.

I contacted Buzz Audio's owner and designer of the REQ-2.2, Tim Farrant, to see what the chances were of getting a unit in for evaluation. Tim was in the process of assembling the first mastering REQ-2.2 units with plans to ship one to Nathan Eldred at Atlas Pro Audio to send around. Unfortunately it was already committed to another mastering engineer, David Greenberg of Sonopod Mastering. But after a month of waiting, I finally got the unit in, and it was well worth the wait.