

A-Designs Audio Pacifica Mic Preamp

The sound of the Quad Eight console is back and in a box!

by Russ Long, 10.31.2006

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I fell in love with the Quad Eight console while working at Nashville's House of David studio (www.houseofdavidstudio.com) in the early 90s. Although the sound of the Quad Eight isn't as well known as that of Neve or API desks to most engineers, it is every bit as good and just knowing that Pink Floyd's The Wall album was mixed on three tied together Quad-Eights is enough to send shivers up my spine.

While using the Quad Eight Ventura, Coronado and Pacifica console preamplifiers for reference, Peter Montessi and his team of audio gurus at A-Designs Audio came up with a preamp design that captures the heart and soul of these classic consoles resulting in a solid state, single RU, rackmounted, microphone preamplifier. Avoiding the current cloning trend, A-Designs Audio made the decision to think outside the box and make the tribute something beyond the legacy. This resulted in the A-Designs Pacifica (\$1,995), a wonderful sounding mic pre with a classic look that retains the cream colored panel and red knob scheme from the original Quad Eight Pacifica console.

Features

The single rack space Pacifica is a solid state mic preamp that includes custom input and output transformers. The rear panel has a pair of balanced XLR input and output connectors as well as an IEC connector for power. On the front panel, each channel includes a level control that provides up to 72 dB of gain. There is a pad switch that activates the 20 dB pad and a 48V switch that activates phantom power. A red LED illuminates when phantom power is activated. The Pacifica's phase switch reverses the polarity of the signal and the on/off switch activates the power. A blue LED power indicator illuminates when the power is activated. Also on the front panel are a pair of Hi-Z 1/4-inch inputs for direct injection. The preamp's input impedance is 600 ohm @ 400 Hz. The noise level (EIN) measures -128 dB. The circuit has a frequency response of 9 Hz - 101 kHz with less than 1% distortion.

The box measures 19 inches x 1.75 inches x 10 inches and weighs 11 pounds.

In Use

After having such a history with the Quad Eight console I couldn't wait to put the Pacifica to the test to see how it compares to its ancestor. Thankfully, it doesn't disappoint. I've been a fan of A-Designs Audio and their gear since day one and I must say this is my favorite piece yet. I describe the sound of the Pacifica as somewhere between the sound of a vintage Neve and an API. It effectively blends the aggressive presence and boldness of a Neve (less the compressed sound of a 1073) with the midrange clarity of an API. The result is a fantastic sounding mic preamp with a vintage coloration that sounds terrific on absolutely everything.

I've put the Pacifica to work on absolutely everything imaginable over the last three months and I have yet to be disappointed. The box works wonders on drums and percussion. I used it along with a pair of Audix SCX25-As to capture overheads. The sound was near perfect requiring no equalization at all. I was also able to capture a great overhead sound using the Pacifica along with a Royer SF-12 but in this instance I ran into the line inputs of a pair of Daking modules so I could add some top end shimmer. The box is amazing on kick and snare. I had equally good results using it along with an AKG D112 and a beyerdynamic M88 to capture the kick drum and on snare drum I used it along with a Heil PR20, my new snare drum mic of choice, and it sounded great; a full big body with plenty of crack and aggression. The mic worked equally well capturing toms and congas (Sennheiser 421s), and hi-hat, tambourine and shaker (Royer SF-1).

I had great results recording keyboards through the front panel DIs. This active Hi-Z 1/4-inch input places the input transformer directly in the signal path for a massive direct sound. I also had great results using one of the front panel Hi-Z inputs to record bass.

I found that the Pacifica works perfectly along with a Royer R-122 to record electric guitars. I was actually surprised to find myself frequently not even needing an equalizer. The guitar signal path that I ended up using most often is the Royer R-122 into the Pacifica into an Empirical Labs Distressor (or occasionally a Tube-Tech CL-1B) and then straight into the converter. Occasionally I would add a GML 8200 equalizer between the preamp and the compressor but more often

than not, it wasn't necessary. I also had good results using the preamp along with an Earthworks SR-77 and a Neumann KM-86i to record acoustic guitar. In both instances I added a GML 8200 EQ and a Tube-Tech CL-1B to the signal path.

The Pacifica is also wonderful as a vocal mic preamp. I used it along with a Brauner VM1-KHE, a Sony C-800G and a Blue Cactus with both male and female vocals and was always pleased with the Pacifica's performance.

My only real complaint about the Pacifica is its lack of a high-pass filter. This isn't that big of a deal because you can always get that from another piece of gear but there were several occasions (most often with keyboards into the front panel DIs or an electric guitar cabinet with a Royer 122) when a high-pass filter would have allowed me to go straight into the converter out of the Pacifica.

Summary

The A-Designs Audio Pacifica is astonishingly close both sonically and visually to

the original Quad Eight desk. At approximately \$1,000/channel, it isn't cheap but it is easily within reach of any professional facility and most project studios. It's an excellent choice for anyone who wants a clean, punchy microphone preamp packed full of character and versatility.

Review Setup

Apple Macintosh 2 GHz Dual Processor G5 w/2 GB RAM; Digidesign Pro Tools 7.1; Lucid Gen-X-96 clock; PMC AML-1 monitors; AKG D112, Audix SCX25-A, beyerdynamic M88, Blue Cactus, Brauner VM1-KHE, Earthworks SR-77, Heil Sound PR20, Neumann KM-86i, Royer Labs R-122, SF-12, Sennheiser 421, Sony C-800G microphones.