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Sessionmaster's advanced specifications were developed by Stewart Ward, designer of the much loved Sessionette 75.

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Studio Sound's Music News is compiled by Zenon Schoepe

Sessionmaster guitar preamp

Guitar processors are getting smarter but a reassuring trend is the back-to-basics tube and analogue approach being re-injected into the market by some manufacturers. And it needn't cost the earth if the single-channel 1U Sessionmaster guitar preamp from Award is anything to go by.

Front panel controls are sparse. Treble, middle and bass controls are presented in that order from the left (back-to-front or is it just me?) together with pots for input gain and output level. Pushbutton switches engage mid and bass boost as well as gain boost, which also has the effect of placing the EQ section of the unit post-overdrive. Connections are via standard jack with the input on the front panel and a so-called recording or treated output socket and normal output socket found on the back. Interestingly, both can be used at once. Powering is via an external power supply.

Construction-wise it's adequate but only just. The 1U rackmount front panel is aluminium and bendy and the switches, pots, audio sockets and power socket are all mounted directly on the PCB with no strain reliefs.

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While certainly sturdier and better built than it sounds, it doesn't inspire confidence in this unit's ability to survive prolonged on-road or even intermittent abuse. While the Sessionmaster is very inexpensive and quite obviously aimed squarely at the home market, its performance is likely to attract admirers from the pro fraternity where the lack of a tougher front panel and surfaced fixed connectors will do it no favours.

However, no matter what attempts are made to criticise this featherweight device, on plugging in there is no getting away from the fact that the Sessionmaster sounds quite incredible. It's ridiculously quiet and certainly as good as, if not better than, any game clean feed let alone your average tweed classic with an RE20 poked into a cone. As no internal gating is used we must assume that there are some damn fine electronics on board.

Immediately apparent is the diversity of tonal flexibility — something that can't always be boasted with guitar amps. The controls interact with great fluidity and most actions or tweaks have an immediate effect with the simple

layout encouraging experimentation.

Most spectacular is the palette of softly overdriven timbres — the character of which is again infinitely variable. The 'teetering on the edge of graunch' texture is the singularly most elusive sound in most, more costly, alternatives, which often cater instead for out and out overdrive or glassy Rockman tones, neglecting the important territory in between.

Clean sounds are nothing if not stunning and in line with everything else the Sessionmaster does, guitars still manage to maintain their individual signature. Thus a Strat sounds like a Strat and doesn't mesh into the oblivion of its humbucked brethren, even at the most extreme settings. This is something which is certainly not the case with many dedicated guitar multi-effects processors.

Overdriven sounds are subject to personal preferences and a guitarist's perception of what overdrive ought to sound like. Here again the shaping offered particularly by way of the mid and bass boost switches is substantial with a pleasing envelope — sustained notes decay naturally without break up or fizz. Tone control is provided by a bridged tee EQ network of the type used in many of the most highly regarded guitar amps around, and the amount of

'choke' that can be added to the three bands is authentic and also permits fine adjustment to be made. The Sessionmaster is not a 'two decent settings' type of affair.

As you will have noticed I have taken to this cheap little unit in no uncertain terms. In spite of, and because of, the £149 tag I have to say that it is among the most convincing guitar preamps I have heard. I believe its price has been made possible by concentrating entirely on the business of getting a decent guitar sound this side of a microphone without diluting its attraction with multifarious effects and processing that are seldom needed and often duplicated or available in a more versatile package elsewhere in the rack. And while it may be a little lightly sprung in the build stakes no compromises have been made in the performance — the silence of the unit bears this out.

Even for twice the money the Sessionmaster is a steal as it has succeeded in making competing products seem unfocused and rather crude by comparison. Guitarists interested in recording without a loudspeaker will not be disappointed I'll warrant.

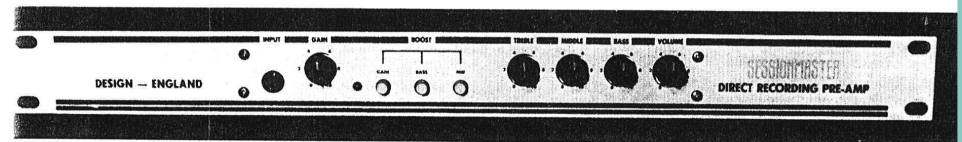
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test

Importør: Sigma Music

Sessionmaster

forforsterker for gitar



Mats Eriksen

De siste årene har markedet formelig overfløymet av pre-amper for gitar. Mange av dem har vært gode og vist seg meget funksjonelle for gitarister både i øvings-, live-, og innspillingssituasjon. Min personlige innvending har imidlertid alltid vært at de pre-amptypene jeg kjenner til har et altfor sterkt eget tonepreg og dermed låter bortimot likt uansett hvilken gitar eller mikrofontype man bruker. Dessuten har slike produkter en tendens til å være verdiløse.

Alle mine fordommer ble detronisert da jeg forleden prøvde en Sessionmaster gitarpreamp, som rent bortsett fra å være latterlig enkel å betjene (en stor fordel i mitt tilfelle), samt at prisen var usedvanlig sympatisk.

Etter å ha prøvd Sessionmaster på stereocanlegget hjemme i stuen, var det klart at den var helt utmerket til øvingsbruk. Like etter prøvde jeg den i studio, og resultatet var like forbløffende. Både ren og forvrengt lyd var førsteklasses, men det mest imponerende var at den virkelig reagerte som en god gitarforsterker. På det for så vidt enkelt utstyrte panelet (gain, treble, mid, bass, volume samt boost for gain, bass og mid) kunne man forandre lyden radikalt, uten at det varme, naturo

preget forsvant. Skiftet man mikrofon på gitaren, var forskjellen merkelig motsetning til på andre produkter av denne arten. Til og med kabinettfilteret fungerte. Sessionmasteren, som er engelskproduisert, er allerede flittig i bruk i studio her i Bergen.

I forrige utgave av "Gitar skolen" var jeg inne på gitar-preamps hensiktsmessighet ved lavt budsjetterte innspillinger og til hjemmestudiobruk. Etter å ha prøvd Sessionmasteren, tør jeg påstå at denne kombinert med en brukbar klang er det beste oppsettet du kan få til disse formålene, men den holder utvilsomt mål også til påkostede og ambisiøse produksjoner. Jeg anbefaler den helt uten forbehold.

MP