



# Presonus ADL 600 | £1,999

With a recent wave of solid-state mic amps gracing these pages, it was about time we saw some valves. *Jon Musgrave* fires up something special



## WHAT IS IT?

Dual channel high voltage tube preamp

## CONTACT

Who: Source Distribution  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8962 5080  
Web: [sourcedistribution.co.uk](http://sourcedistribution.co.uk)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Excellent construction
- 2 Fabulous headroom and sound
- 3 Reasonable price for class

**L**ike it or not, a truly decent bit of analogue outboard still costs money. Obviously it should hold its value, but even so, big spending on all but a handful of items is now unusual for most of us. So what's this got to do with the ADL 600?

Well inevitably we've become far more picky when it comes to spending big bucks, so when I first heard that this Presonus unit was around the two grand mark, I was stunned. Presonus have delivered some excellent gear in the past, but we've never seen anything quite in this league (both in terms of price bracket and aspirations).

## Lab-tastic

So what's the story? Well the ADL name may be a bit of a giveaway – the Presonus ADL 600 is in fact a unit designed by Anthony DeMaria. Famed for his boutique valve compressors, the 600 is the result of a joint venture with US company Presonus. Initially released

over there almost a year ago, this Presonus-manufactured and distributed unit is now available in the UK, and if other ADL designs are anything to go by, should sound fantastic.

A brief look at the spec (three valves per channel plus custom input and

output transformers) indicates serious quality. And when you factor in the high-voltage circuitry, you're also looking at quite an unusual design, too. No wonder it was nominated for a TEC Achievement Award...

## Signal flow

Starting on the front panel, each channel's input controls are arranged logically from left to right, with the input selector (instrument, line, mic) also doubling as an impedance selector for the mic channel.

For the mic input only, you get four impedance choices (1500, 900, 300 and 150 Ohms), a 20dB pad and 48V phantom (all individually switchable). Both line and mic inputs then pass through the input transformer. The instrument input bypasses all this, joining at the first gain stage. This is the main gain knob (30 – 65dB in 5dB steps) and amplification is achieved using two valves (one 6922 and one

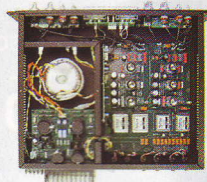
## Pedigree DeMaria

For 20 years Anthony DeMaria Labs (ADL) have supplied hand-built quality equipment to top musicians, engineers and producers. The designs include compressors and DIs with an emphasis on valve circuitry, and often they take their influence from classic gear.

The ADL 1000 and 1500 are heavily influenced by the Teletronix LA2A, with the

ADL 670 being a modern-day recreation of the Fairchild 670 mastering compressor/limiter (complete with 20 valves and 14 transformers).

It's impressive stuff and inevitably this gear costs



money. Bizarrely though, it wasn't until a few years ago that Anthony DeMaria put together a valve preamp prototype.

Following a chance discussion with Presonus head honcho Jim Odom, the two parties hatched a plan to form a joint venture purely for this design. The result is the ADL 600, designed by DeMaria and hand built in the US by Presonus.





12AT7A). Next up you've got the three-position high-pass filter (40Hz, 80Hz and 120Hz @ 6dB per octave) and then the 'trim' circuit. This uses the second 6922 valve, offering 10dB continuously variable cut and boost.

Finally there's a phase reverse switch and the output transformer. All valves operate at +/-320V (hence the

impedance option, so I'm curious as to its effects. I'm surprised by how much variation this gives. With the lowest setting (150 Ohms) it really starts to load the mic output, subtly reducing top-end response. But even switching between 900 and 1500 (more typical standard mic pre impedances) there's a noticeable difference. Some people may

Out of curiosity I try the ADL as a line amp (giving me a chance to A/B its sound properly). Because of the two gain stages, within limits you can drive each stage slightly differently. However, even at a basic unity gain setting the circuit has a subtle, enhancing effect. To my ears this is in the upper to high frequencies. As you push things further and start to drive the valves, this is replaced by a natural limiting effect until eventually the distortion becomes quite audible.

### Rated

It'll come as no surprise that I rate this box; it's a beautiful piece of engineering. But important though that is, it's the sound that counts and that's truly big. It may sound crazy, but it's the best way I can describe it. Not only that, but the gain and component structure also offers some useful sound colouring opportunities too.

To me the only things that would make the ADL 600 better would be a built-in A/D converter and maybe an insert point. But to do it justice the converter would need to be top quality, and that would add another grand to the

price. On the subject of price, what I initially found quite surprising I'm now not surprised by at all – and with street prices coming in below

the £1,999 list, the ADL 600 is (for its class) a serious bargain. **FM**

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high voltage name tag) and the unit is transformer balanced on XLR connectors (except for the front-panel instrument jack).

Out of the box, the ADL 600 is a large, weighty unit, with its power transformer and associated components taking up over a third of the case. A look through the vented lid reveals a tidy layout and quality components. The front panel knobs and switches all feel suitably solid, and the twin VU/LED metering looks responsive.

### Top drawer

Of all the mic amps I've had on trial recently, this is the first to offer an input

find this sort of feature a distraction, but if you've got time to play with these sorts of things, you may not want to go back to a fixed impedance mic pre.

Sonically my immediate impression is a real sense of headroom, but given the valve and transformer design you may expect there to be some rounding off at high levels. This isn't at all obvious to my ears, simply a genuine sense of dynamics without fear of things peaking. On the gain front, my troublesome low-output bass guitar benefits from the ADL's low noise floor, as does the SE R-1 ribbon mic I have on trial (see p.98). Valves, transformers and ribbons – what a retro-fest!

### SPECS

**Input impedance:** Mic 150/300/900/1500 Ohms; Line 2kOhm; Instrument 100kOhm;

**Output Impedance:** 600 Ohm

**Maximum Input:** Mic +25dBu (20dB pad in); Line +30dBu; Instrument +30dBu

**Gain:** Mic 18dB to 72dB; Line -12dB to 40dB; Instrument -5dB to 42dB

**Maximum Output Level:** +23dBu (@ 0.5% THD+N)

**Noise:** All inputs minimum gain -95dBu (A-weighted); Microphone Equivalent Input Noise -125dBu (A-weighted)

**Frequency Response:** 10Hz to 45kHz +/-1dB

**Tubes (per channel):** 1 x 12AT7A, 2 x 6922

**Dimensions:** 483 x 432 x 89mm

**Weight:** 13kg

### ALTERNATIVES



**Groove Tubes Vipre**  
**£2,000**

The Vipre incorporates some seriously impressive features, including variable impedance and slew rates. There's only the one channel, mind you...

[groovetubes.com](http://groovetubes.com)



**Thermionic Culture Earlybird 2**  
**£2,100**

Good to see a UK company delivering with an excellent dual channel valve preamp and EQ.

[thermioniculture.com](http://thermioniculture.com)



**Sebatron VMP2000eVU**  
**£950**

Australian company Sebatron make more affordable (though highly rated) valve gear.

[sebatron.com](http://sebatron.com)

