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MP20



By Garrett Haines

The PreSonus MP20 is an instrument / microphone preamp consisting of dual Class A discrete input buffers followed by a dual servo gain stage. This design translates into a very low noise, high gain box. Both channels contain: gain control, an 80 Hz rumble filter, 48 volt phantom power, phase reverse, send-return jack, and a 20db pad. An illuminated red power button is easily accessed on the front panel.

The unit has two unique features, an IDSS circuit and stereo headphone left-right mix bus. The IDSS control adjusts the drain current on the input FET amplifier. According to PreSonus, this drain alters the even-harmonic levels of the signal. IDSS has an adjustment range of 0% to 100%. The 0% position (knob set at 7 o'clock) passes a pure signal. As the control is rotated to the 100% position (5 o'clock), the signal's even harmonic series is boosted giving the signal a allegedly 'warmer' feel.

The MP20 also has a stereo summing bus monitor. One or both channels can be assigned to the LR buss. A pan knob allows the placement of the selected signal anywhere in the stereo array of the stereo summing bus out-going signal. The headphone output can be used to feed monitoring devices. This is very useful for fighting latency in the digital recording realm.

In use, the MP20 is very flexible. Keeping the IDSS at 0%, the unit resembles one of the pristine 'straight wire with gain' preamps. Although I would not characterize the effect of the IDSS as making a signal 'warm,' it does roll off some of the top end clarity in favor of a more round tone. I found that IDSS was most useful in ranges from 9 o'clock to 2 o'clock on the dial. Past that, the unit seems to emulate that 'wool sock over the microphone' sound. (But if that's your bag\$)

We compared the MP20 versus the Avalon AD2022 - Dual Mono Pure Class A Preamplifier, the Peavey VMP-2 Tube Preamp, and the pres in a Mackie 1604-VLZ.

Against the Mackie there was a very noticeable difference in realism and detail. In short, most people would pick out the MP20 in a blind test. Adding the IDSS feature, we compared the unit versus the Peavey VMP-2. Both units sounded present with the Peavey having slightly more gain, stronger mids, and a generally 'bigger' sound. Clearly the IDSS is an added-bonus, not a full replacement for a high-end tube pre. Pulling the IDSS back to zero, we put the MP20 head to head with the Avalon AD2022. In terms of stereo image and depth the Avalon did sound slightly better. I could see how someone who made a living off of stereo recordings of acoustic or chamber music would opt for the Avalon. But for those of us recording rock, techno, or ensemble music, the MP20 was more the sufficient.

We were actually evaluating the Avalon against the MP20 for purchase. Although we agreed the Avalon sounded 'better' we concluded that for OUR purposes, the Avalon did not sound \$1,900 dollars better (the difference in street prices of the units). Regardless if you are looking for a first pre-amp investment, or you already have a rack of respectable units, the MP20 provides amazing bang for buck performance. Get a unit for evaluation in your environment. I'll bet you will be pleased.