

The Midas XL42 Preamp Equalizer



BY ROGER WILLIAMS III

In the increasingly crowded and specialized world of microphone preamp equalizers, no one doubts the strengths of products offered by sectors of the United Kingdom. Elegant simplicity of design, high-quality components, proper attention to grounding and shielding schemes, and fantastic sonic qualities have yielded raves by engineers worldwide.

Thus we have become enamored with the "British sound," a term associated with the great consoles of Neve, SSL, Trident, etc. But we should not forget, the FOH

ing/parametric "bell" switch and EQ enable switch), mute switch, pan control with enable switch, insert send/return switch, and output level controls with 10 LED output level indicator (-12 dB to +15 dB). The meter is post-output level and pan control, although it can be internally configured to be pre-level and pan. A master power switch with on/off LED indicator is located front-panel right.

The rear jack field reveals more than meets the eye up front, displaying automute input and link 9-pin connectors (similar to RS-232), auto-mute remote control assign right and left dip-switches, right and left

AT-A-GLANCE

Applications: Recording studio and sound reinforcement.

Key Features: Input controls, 180 degree phase switch, phantom power switch, 25 dB line/pad switch, four-way parametric EQ controls.

Price: \$1,416

CONTACT: MIDAS AT 616-695-4750; OR
CIRCLE READER SERVICE 125.

XL42 MIRRORS THE SIMILAR (INPUT CHANNEL) SECTION OF THE XL4 CONSOLE.

sound reinforcement consoles, of which the British manufacturer Midas is a major player. The popular XL4 (\$1,416) is a staple of many touring systems, and the XL42 is an outgrowth (probably by demand) of this well-traveled board. The XL42 is a two-channel, single-rack-space microphone pre/parametric equalizer that mirrors the similar (input channel) section of the XL4 console.

Features

Each of the two channels has input controls (+15 dB to +70 dB), a 180 degree phase switch, 48 V phantom switch, 25 dB line/pad switch, low-cut filter enable switch with accompanying rotary control (continuously adjustable from 20 Hz to 400 Hz), four-way parametric EQ controls (concentric +15 dB to -15 dB boost/cut and bandwidth, frequency control, shelv-



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return/send, insertion points (tt), XLR R/L I/O, and XLR R/L link inputs. A Euro-style AC jack is at the far left.

This many-faceted instrument offers a great deal of options to the Midas console user, including channel expansion (daisy-chaining multiple units), mute group control and application at various insert points (auxiliary busses, matrix groups, etc.). When chained together, the combined outputs

D12, and overhead cymbals could go from K-Zildjian dark to splash sheen when called upon by the AKG 414. Most microphone/instrument combinations yielded an improvement over my current console's EQ.

In the studio, I used the phase switch to help on top/bottom snare drum miking, and vocals benefited from the warm sauce I squeezed out of the mid EQ in shelving

mix, although creative minds that love the sound of the XL4 yet can't afford the console, will surely respond to this offering in a positive way. I would recommend this microphone pre/parametric equalizer to anyone who needs a system component that shines in a variety of applications and has that elusive quality that is well-known by admirers of the British sound.

Roger Williams III is a charter member of the Pro Audio Review stable of writers. He is a system designer for MAS Audio and mixes live sound for numerous veteran blues acts.

YOU'LL FIND THAT THE CONTROLS OF THE XL42 BECOME INTUITIVE AFTER JUST A FEW HOURS OF OPERATION.

sum, giving the operator discrete left and right channels. Configuring DIP switches allow automute scene control functions from XL4 automute masters. But the XL42 also permits those who do not own Midas consoles to enjoy the luxuries this microphone preamp/EQ provides.

In use

A great use for the XL42, due to the available I/O level controls and panable stereo bus, is building a small multi-channel stereo mixer by chaining and stacking units into a rack. It is also handy to load a few of these into an effects or dynamics control rack, to add EQ or channel expansion at the plug of a patch.

I have to say at the outset that the EQ section merits high praise. Sweeping through the frequencies with varied programs, the bass EQ (continuously variable from 20 Hz to 400 Hz) was smooth and warm, the low-mid (variable from 100 Hz to 2 kHz) accurate and refined, the high-mid (variable from 400 Hz to 8 kHz) defined but non-strident, and the treble (variable from 1 kHz to 20 kHz) ethereal yet natural.

In a live setting, adjusting every source from kick drum D12 dynamic to overhead 414 condenser was second nature. Enabling the bandwidth control by pushing the "bell" switch let me really "ring out the wood" of a very ill-tempered kick drum with the AKG

response mode. The pan control gives the XL42 a "submix" capability; I could place either of the two channels' sources anywhere within the recording mix at the LR outputs.

The XL42 was quiet in operation (the manufacturer claims -88 dBu system noise at 0 dB), showing a great deal of well-appreciated headroom. I/Os come electronically balanced, and a transformer option is available. These inputs accept levels up to +6 dBu at microphone input, +26 dBu with the pad switch activated. And the device's maximum output level at +21 dBu with an output impedance at a low 50 ohms (balanced source) can drive a variety of devices easily.

Summary

This device is built like a brick, incorporating a heavy, thick-mil faceplate, Neutrik connectors, and U-frame construction with removable top and bottom plates. Pots and switches are mil-duty and should provide a lengthy usage cycle. Graphics around the EQ section are a bit tough to define, but this is a minor sticking point, considering how much is packed into this beast. Using the controls becomes intuitive after a few hours of operation.

The great tradition of Midas engineering lives on in this component. XL4 users will appreciate what capabilities this adds to the

PRODUCT POINTS

MIDAS XL42

PLUS

- +Excellent sonic qualities
- +Ruggedly built
- +Quiet operation
- +Features

MINUS

- EQ section graphics are difficult to define

THE SCORE

Highly recommended, the XL42 shines in a variety of applications with that elusive "British" sound.

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