

Summit 2BA-221

The third item in the new half-rack series from Summit Audio, the 2BA-221 features the same packaging as the TD-100 instrument preamplifier and TLA-50 levelling amplifier previously reviewed in these pages.

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SUMMIT'S 2BA-221 PREAMPLIFIER features mic and line inputs – plus a DI input for instruments, together with combined solid state and valve circuitry that offers a wide range of possible settings. The front panel features a Line/Hi Z input section with a Hi Z input jack and Input Gain control. A large knob for Tube Output is followed by the solid state mic pre section with Mic Gain control, a variable Input Impedance control and a High Pass frequency control for an HP filter (variable between 20-200Hz, 12dB/octave).

A three-position power switch provides power plus 48V phantom in the left position, power off in the centre and power on in the right without 48V. A blue LED indicates 48V present. Three LEDs indicate gain and there's a -20dB pad, polarity reverse, and filter defeat.

The rear panel has two In/Out Stack jacks for connecting multiple 2BA-221s to form a mono submix, a +4dB balanced output on XLR plus a -10dB balanced output on TRS jack, a TRS Insert and an input section with balanced line level TRS jack and XLR/jack combi for microphone.

There are two basic modes of operation. The first is to use the mic gain control by itself with the tube output at minimum, and the second is to have the mic

gain virtually off and the tube output between 2 and 3 o'clock.

In the first case, you will have what Summit calls a 'clean' sound and, depending on the microphone used, this can be quite hard

and forward – almost brash. Bringing in more of the tube output definitely rounds things out and I found that increasing the tube output and diminishing the mic gain to around 9 – 10 o'clock, the sound widened out and the presence frequencies started to sing.

The icing on the cake is the variable input impedance control. Whereas the idea is to match the input to the microphone being used for optimal performance, it also acts as a very useful tonal shaping tool for providing a response curve that would be difficult to achieve with EQ.

I tried the preamp with a whole range of dynamic and studio condenser microphones and even an EV RE45 N/D short rifle mic for ENG applications. In all cases, the unit performed perfectly. The line input was tested with a variety of signals and there were no problems here. The unit also works as a DI box and does an extremely good job. I could wish for a variable impedance control, as per the TD-100, but space would be a problem.

The final blend of the signal can be tweaked by varying the input gain and tube output controls and the tube output definitely adds more depth to the signal – and I don't mean distortion. The line/Hi Z and mic inputs can also be mixed together and this opens up a whole realm of possibilities.

Overall, the 2BA-221 performed well on all inputs and outputs and was silent in operation and it makes a powerful combination with a TLA-50 on the insert. It's a first class preamp for a variety of situations at a very moderate price (around UK£699). If you need just one decent mic pre, then this could be it. The well-heeled will want a batch of them. ■

PROS

Excellent performance; Hi-Z input; mixable mic and line inputs; variable mic input impedance.

CONS

No variable impedance on the Hi-Z input; not for very low level signal applications; I had to buy one (again!); one is not enough.



EXTRAS

Terry has now reviewed all the units in Summit's half-rack series: the TD-100 instrument preamp (*Resolution, V1.1*) and the TLA-50 compressor (*Resolution, V1.2*).



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