

# Summit Audio ECS-410 Everest

Summit Audio's Everest scales new heights of flexibility and function for a recording channel. **GEORGE SHILLING** comes over all sort of poetic...



This new flagship model from Summit Audio boasts four discrete processor sections and a host of features that make it supremely adaptable to recording and processing tasks. Weighing in at 26lbs, the beautiful yet sturdy 2u monolith-like construction oozes quality (UK£3,103 inc. VAT). The front panel is something of a departure from Summit's previously rather staid presentations, and comes across like a souped-up Bentley. Jaunty, angular carved-out sections on the exceptionally thick aluminium front panel distinguish the different processors that comprise Microphone Preamp, Passive Three-Band EQ, Dual Mode Compressor and Drive Bus Master Output and Overdrive. Finally, there is also the matrix of routing buttons in the TouchPatch section.

The rear is also busy, with separate inputs and +4dB outputs for each of the four sections, a TRS insert point in the preamp, and sidechain and Stereo Link jacks in the Dynamics section. There are also additional -10dB outputs on the preamp and Drive Bus sections.

Switching on, there is a one-second pause before a relay clicks and the meter and power lamp illuminate, along with any LEDs that were lit when the unit was powered off.

The Mic Preamp section features a gain knob with a light, undamped feel, and a fast acting 10-segment meter with green, amber and red segments that seem to cover the final 20dB up to overload level. The knob is simply calibrated from 1 to 10, mic gain is quoted as +20 to +60dB, and toggle switches select a 20dB pad, Polarity, 48V phantom, HPF at 60Hz and Tube or Solid State output. I'd have preferred an LED or locking toggle for the phantom switch to help avert accidents.

In use, it is immediately obvious (without need for comparison) that the mic preamp has an incredibly detailed, open and unforced quality, even in Tube output mode. On voice, I can only describe the character as crystal clear: it's the audio equivalent of cool flowing mountain spring water, especially when paired with a large condenser (*We should bottle your descriptions.* Ed). The Tube and Solid State output modes sound remarkably open, the very subtle differences including perhaps a small increase in lower frequency 'cuddliness' and a very slight removal of midrange hardness in tube mode, but we are talking tiny differences here. The Tube mode is ever so slightly friendlier, but both are detailed and involving, yet in no way tiresome or wearing. I spent hours recording and editing some spoken



word material using the Everest, and didn't tire of listening to the person speaking, enjoying it rather more than a previous session with a different preamp (even though the subject matter was again 'Getting Pregnant Naturally').

The front panel 10Mohms Hi-Z input also has plenty of gain and with single coil guitar pickups and even bass guitar it displayed a hint more of that cool openness and detail displayed by the mic preamp in a comparison to a couple of other high-end Instrument preamps I use.

The 3-band Fe1 inductor-based EQ section is straightforward, with six switched frequencies per band and a cut/boost range of 12dB. Top and bottom bands feature shelf/peak toggles. Peaking bandwidth is two octaves, and cut and boost are up to 12dB, so it's not for surgery. Subtle tonal changes and moderate shaping can be achieved using a set of well chosen frequencies that cover most needs. This kind of beautifully effective sound shaping can only enhance a good signal. For opening out the top-end slightly on a male backing vocal recording I added a touch of 10k shelf and a little 2.5k to add a little bite — simple but effective. The low band can be extremely warming at 60 or 100Hz, or conversely by cutting 390 or 270Hz in peak mode, you can de-clutter. The excellent phase coherence lends this section grace and elegance, and you really cannot ruin the sound with this EQ.

The Compressor section features two distinct modes that govern ratio. Classic provides soft-knee operation with a maximum ratio of 3:1, while Tight mode is generally a faster acting, aggressive and more modern-sounding squash with a ratio of up to 10:1. For most vocal and instrument recording Classic is the way to go, with a beautifully smooth character evident. Attack and Release are continuously variable, allowing for a range of signals and uses although the Release won't go super-fast for crunchy drum compression in either mode. A useful 9-segment LED gain reduction meter shows what is happening, and deflecting up to four or five LEDs, vocals are pleasantly kept in check. Threshold has plenty of range to enable heavier compression and a Gain knob permits level juggling with a range of -6 to +13.5dB.

The Drive Bus Output section includes a traditional VU meter, a nice large output gain knob and a smaller

Drive knob. Neither is labelled, and oddly, both knobs' position markers are oriented sideways. A three-position toggle selects between Solid State, Tube and Bypass. Cranking the smaller Drive knob increases gain to the circuit and an amber LED lights to indicate distortion. A red overload light tells you when you've gone too far. In Bypass the amber light still glows, and the small Drive gain knob is still in circuit — distortion, it seems, although subtle, is still possible. But in all settings, the circuit is rather subtle (unless completely overloaded). Finding the sweet spot where you are driving hard but not overloading, the Tube drive can slightly warm and pleasantly fuzz up the sound. However, I found it rather unremarkable and uninvolved. On some signals, no difference at all could be discerned between Tube and Bypass, even when driving just below overload — this is no Thermionic Culture Vulture — and in most cases driving the signal simply succeeds in making the mic preamp sound like a slightly inferior unit, which of course it isn't.

The TouchPatch system comprises a series of routing buttons covering all possible signal flow routings. The first column of buttons includes the Mic Preamp with every possible following order combination, the second column omits the pre, and finally there is a 'No Route' button. All switching is relay-based, and activating a routing defeats the employed section's rear input (apart from the pre) while leaving its output still available. LEDs on each processor indicate when they are in a routing. You might wonder why all the extra rear connections are necessary when you have such comprehensive routing, and individual section bypass toggles, but wiring all the connections does allow the Everest to be used for three or even four signals simultaneously, even though many users will rarely need to change routing once their preferred situation is established.

The front panel is inevitably a little cluttered, and the black dials can be hard to read but this is a very minor criticism of an unquestionably top-class sounding unit. Although I'd ditch the Drive Bus circuitry, the Mic Preamp, Compressor and EQ sections all shine gorgeously with detailed sound and classy characteristics. The Everest is perhaps especially suited to audiophile jazz and classical recordings, but I suspect it will be highly desirable to all recordists. ■

## PROS

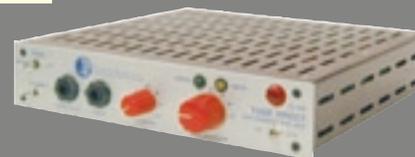
Supremely detailed and open mic preamp; excellent compressor and EQ sections; clever routing; comprehensive I-O flexibility.

## CONS

Disappointing DriveBus section.

## EXTRAS

The entry level for Summit Audio



ownership is the TD-100 Tube Direct Box and Instrument Preamplifier. Its input section is driven by a 12AX7A/ECC83 valve with the output section driven by a discrete transistor circuit using 24V rails.

## Contact

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