

Vintage Design DMP and CA73

These two units from Swedish classic aficionados Vintage Design offer a dual mic preamp and a single mic preamp with a 3-band EQ plus filter. Having spent much of the year using different vintage Neve consoles with several different types of input module, they were of particular interest to **GEORGE SHILLING**



BOTH THE DMP and the CA73 are weighty 1u boxes with characteristic vintage styling and switchgear. This authenticity continues under the bonnet with components such as Camhill St Ives transformers and ELMA switches. Vintage Design's Thomas Kristiansson has apparently devoted a great deal of time to researching the history of these designs and has made good use of that knowledge here.

The DMP (UK £1090 + VAT) features two mic channels arranged side-by-side. The mic amps are a two-stage design similar to the 1290 circuit used in the classic Neve 1063/1073. Each channel features a combi-type input socket on the front for instrument (jack) or microphone (XLR) input, the latter paralleled with additional rear panel XLR connections for the mic inputs, alongside XLR line outputs.

There is also an intriguing jack socket on the rear for each channel labelled EQ-18dB. This is a TRS connection for inserting external EQ, running at a nominal -18dB, that is operated by pressing the EQ switch on the front of the unit. Unusually, power is provided by a modern 24V AC wall-wart via a flimsy round-pin connector, which rather spoils the 'vintage' feel, but seems to work perfectly well.

The red coloured coarse gain knobs have 5dB steps and have a sensitivity range of +10dB to -80dB for the mic input. Maximum gain, however, was roughly similar to that of my Neve-inspired Phoenix DRS-2 (labelled as -70 at maximum). The smaller grey continuous pot is akin to an output fader, cutting the signal completely at full anticlockwise. You would normally keep this fully to the right in most recording situations but it is possible to drive the first stage by turning this down and cranking the coarse gain. Furthermore, the crib-sheet accompanying the unit even suggests driving the output too, and using an external pad!

The uncalibrated LED meter is before the output knob, and seems to show only the last few dB of signal before clipping — in normal operation this rarely lights up but is a useful indicator of the available headroom. A 'Z' button provides alternative input impedance settings for Line and Mic, the XLRs switching between 300 and 1200ohms, and jumpers are provided for matching different output load impedances — a circuit compensates with high frequency EQ.

A set of four jumpers was taped to the back, these

are for internal adjustment of the HF EQ curve: original 1073s rolled off from around 10kHz with a drop of up to 1dB at 20kHz. With the jumpers in place this is counteracted with a boost of around +0.5dB at 20kHz and a -3dB point at around 60kHz for some additional 'air'. There are also additional jumpers for adding a subtle treble lift if so desired. These EQ corrections are fairly gentle, but nevertheless quite useful, and it might have been better if they appeared as switches instead of fiddly internal jumpers that are unlikely to be changed once the unit is installed.

While the DMP recreates two 1063-style input modules, the CA73 (UK £1150 + VAT) is, unsurprisingly, similar to the 1073. The mic amp section is similar to that on the DMP, although the coarse gain knob has a slightly input transformer arrangement and therefore an extended gain range. While all the authentic components have been used, the CA73 enhances the design of the 1073 by adding a few extra selectable EQ frequencies and adding a variable frequency HF section. This latter addition is most welcome. But it still sounds like classic Neve to me, with a huge amount of power and richness available in all frequency bands.

The bottom end is big and warm and the middle has the vitality of a Neve console, while the High Pass filter is extremely powerful. The lack of centre-detented gain knobs is always mildly irritating, but, of course, the frequency selectors all have an Off position.

The character of tone of the mic preamps is very

similar to my Neve inspired Phoenix Audio DRS-2, although the warmth of a ribbon mic seemed slightly more pronounced whatever the Z setting. They undoubtedly capture the spirit of vintage units without capturing the crackles and unreliability of old examples, or indeed the price tag of modern reissues.

These are both good value front end solutions for lovers of the sound. The Instrument inputs on the DMP sound great, somehow enhancing the sound of an electric guitar with a pleasant slightly squashy character that seems to make it sound like one instrument, unlike the way some DIs seems to separate the characteristics of the individual strings. And it's always fun to overdrive it a bit. I did have some small concerns as there was a slight legending error. However, despite that, a great deal of attention to detail appears to have gone into the design and construction, and the sound quality easily lives up to expectations, and they cost a fraction of reissues. ■

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PROS Authentic sound; CA73's enhanced EQ flexibility; impedance switching; gold-plated switches and relays; great value.

CONS Danger of sending 48V phantom to line sources.

EXTRAS Vintage Design's CL1 is a compressor-limiter built with the classic 2254 in mind with St Ives transformers before and after the diodebridge and a transformer balanced Class-A output stage. The signal path is said to be a mix from the 2254/2264. The sidechains are said to be modified and the unit has separate controls for limiting and compression.

