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In The Doghouse

By Chris Fitzgerald

EA iAMP Doubler

If you were to ask a working double bassist what features the perfect amp head might have, the list would likely contain many, if not all, of the following parameters: small, lightweight, powerful, piezo-friendly input impedance, two input channels to accommodate mixing in a microphone when desired, XLR input jack for the mic, phantom power on the mic channel, a high-pass filter, a notch filter, adjustable phase control, built in DI for the house system, and an effects loop with a blend control. Oh, and if it's not too much trouble, could you throw in a switchable EQ section so that I can switch between two different EQ settings on the fly, if I'm only using one channel?

Meeting demands such as these seems to have been the goal of the design crew of the Euphonic Audio iAMP Doubler, which manages to pack all of these features into a box measuring 2.1"H x 10.5"W x 5.4"D and weighing in at 2.5 pounds.

There has been a lot of discussion among musicians about the new micro amps on the market, many of which employ class-D topology with switch-mode power supplies (SMPS). There is a brief tutorial on the subject of different amplifier classes on EA's website for those interested in the technical details of the power amp section. This goes a bit over my head – so I try to stick to a sonic assessment of the results – but for those interested, please check out the well-written descriptions of different power amp types at

<http://www.eaamps.com/index.php?p=classd&m=tech>. Whatever the technical details involved, the amplification focus for double bassists is usually on transparency, that holy grail of “my bass, only louder.” For me, to date, I find that I don't object to the sound of class-D power amps, as long as the preamp feeding it passes muster. And I've always liked the sound of EA preamps in the past. The power rating of 550 watts @ 4 ohms and 310 watts @ 8 ohms is very impressive in a box as small as this one.

In spite of this, I have to confess that when I first unpacked the box and pulled out the novel-sized Doubler to give it a try, I was a little suspicious. Would all of these functions work? And if so, would I be able to keep track of them and utilize them on the gig? Could something this



light possibly be powerful enough to do what I need it to do on the bandstand? My suspicions were allayed as soon as I plugged it into an EA Wizzy 10 in my music room and gave it a trial run. Everything worked as advertised, and the sound was right there from the beginning. After checking the pickup sound, I hooked up a mic and tried the second channel. Again, everything worked easily and sounded good. Satisfied after playing for a bit and knowing that what sounds good at home can sound very different on the bandstand, I decided to forgo further testing and take the Doubler out to some gigs and see how it did in the real world.

After figuring out how to dial-in a basic sound on each channel and combine them, I was able to get a really natural sound out of both pickup and mic in every situation. Along the way, I had to remind myself at various points that all of the hazards of mixing a pickup (Fishman Full Circle) and a mic (Shure Beta 57a) on a gig had to be dealt with when using the Doubler to the same extent that they would be with any amplification setup. Most important, that there is a point of diminishing returns with the microphone, beyond which any increase in volume of either the mic or the blend results in a hollow, washed-out sound that doesn't do justice to either input source. The best results came from setting the master volume at about 3-4 o'clock (nearly all the way up), then finding the highest setting at which the mic sounds natural and leaving it there. From this point, any increase in volume came from raising the pickup channel, and the mix using this method was always as natural as possible (i.e. using as much mic signal as possible) without washing out the overall sound. The variable phase control came in handy

in optimizing the sound at the working volume level of the band once I realized that it was basically a very intuitive control, – i.e. “when mixing signals, sweep this knob until you get the best sound, then leave it in that position.” Different gig settings resulted in different positions of the knob when used in this way, and it's nice to have this fine tuning option when blending.

When using only the pickup, the input section of the Doubler is extremely versatile because of the way the input stage is set up. As with many preamps, there is a sweet spot in the gain structure which, when in this range, produces a natural and relaxed sound yet still provides enough headroom in the power section to be useful. For double bass, I've found that the “transparent/natural” sound is often found when the preamp signal isn't as hot as I would expect to be optimal. The Doubler has plenty of juice to handle this mode of use, but when a more present, solid, slightly “aggressive” sound is desired, that can be dialed-in as well by adjusting the preamp as explained in the manual using the LED level indicator. With a little experimentation, the input section allows the player to choose from a very relaxed and ambient sound (LED almost never lights) to an extremely present and solid sound (input LED lights on hardest attacks). Having the LED as a gauge of input signal is a welcome feature for any bassist desiring this level of control – this is a feature I wish every amp had.

Overall, I was extremely comfortable using the Doubler on gigs once I had the features more or less figured out. I was only able to test it with EA Wizzy 10 speakers (two of these are all the speakers I have left after selling my

beloved VL208 cabs because of the weight), so the results could easily be different with different cabs. Given that I was limited to the Wizzy 10's, the results were very solid. Using only a single cab resulted in a very natural, “hi-fi” sound that was very clear and not heavy on the bottom. One of my grad students said that compared to the rig I had been using on the same gig, the Doubler/Wizzy rig sounded “more like my bass does acoustically” (to be fair, I don't use a mic with the rig I had been using before). Using two Wizzy 10's with the Doubler provided a lot more headroom and thickness to the sound, and didn't seem to tax the head at all in terms of heat.

Summary:

The Doubler is a wonderful little amp with a ton of features, especially considering its size, weight, and price point. My only complaint – and it's a minor one – is that the high-pass filter frequency isn't adjustable above 80Hz, and at very loud volumes, I like to have this option. Other than this, it's hard to find much not to like with this new pint-sized (flask-sized?) entry into the micro amp market. I give it a hearty two thumbs up.

Soundclips:

(Doubler and a single Wizzy 10)

Love For Sale

<http://chrisfitzgeraldmusic.com/mp3/LoveForSale.mp3>

(Doubler and two Wizzy 10's)

Solar

<http://chrisfitzgeraldmusic.com/mp3/Solar.mp3>

(segue) Soul Eyes

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