

PRO AUDIO REVIEW

Gear & Software Reviews For The End-User

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Studio

BY RUSS LONG

The relatively new pro audio company Lipinski Sound made their mic preamp debut last fall at the AES show in San Francisco. Producer and engineer Andrew Lipinski, the company's founder, has long been a respected feature in the world of high-end audio. After years of disappointment with the current state of professional audio equipment, Mr. Lipinski found himself performing countless modifications to equipment that didn't live up to his expectations. This eventually led to the design and construction of his own components which are a culmination of his lifetime pursuit of audio perfection. Lipinski Sound has made it a mandate to deliver exceptional equipment that will withstand the test of time, to the most discerning audio professionals.

In the effort to design the perfect microphone preamplifier, Mr. Lipinski spent significant time evaluating microphone preamplifier components from the ground up. This included both transformer and transformerless designs, classic and contemporary designs, and tube, transistor and integrated circuit based designs. After completing his research, Mr. Lipinski concluded that the ultimate preamp should have a two-position turn ratio transformer input and that it should incorporate two amplifying stages. This resulted in the Lipinski L-408 and L-409 microphone preamplifiers.

Lipinski L-408 and L-409 Microphone Preamplifiers



FEATURES

The L-408 and L-409 offer identical controls and are both visually stunning. The \$995 L-408 is finished in brushed steel with all controls labeled in bold black and the \$1,095 L-409 is finished in black with white labeling. Both preamplifiers feature a copper anodized enclosure that has been left

unfinished for better conductivity and the best possible RFI protection. Located on the front panel of each mic pre is a three-position pad switch which can be set to 0 (off), -10 dB or -20 dB. The \$695 L-410 power supply (available in brushed steel or black) features an oversized toroidal transformer and has the ability to power up to nine units.

The rear panel of each mic preamp includes a female XLR connector for microphone input, a male XLR connector for audio output, and two power supply connectors for power in and out (power out is used to route the power to another preamp). A pair of 1/4-inch jacks allows the signal to be patched directly out of the preamps first stage or directly into the pre's second stage. The power supply and the mic preamps are

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each equipped with a ground lift switch to help resolve grounding issues. In addition, the power supply has a 115V/230V voltage switch that allows the correct operating voltage to be selected. Lipinski Sound recommends the use of one power supply for no more than five microphone preamplifiers to achieve optimum performance. The modular design of the L-408, L-409 and L-410 offers a wide variety of mounting options.

Both mic preamps have two amplifying stages, two separate 10-step gain controls, and a separate meter for each stage. The first stage is built on discrete transistors and has Class A circuitry with minimal negative feedback, and with a separate unbalanced output. The second stage uses the fastest available current feedback integrated amplifiers and has a balanced output. G1 (the first stage) is in 4 dB steps; 4 dB, 8 dB, 12 dB, 16 dB, 20

dB, 24 dB, 28 dB, 32 dB, 36 dB or 40 dB and G2 (the second stage) is in 2 dB steps; 2 dB, 4 dB, 6 dB, 8 dB, 10 dB, 12 dB, 14 dB, 16 dB, 18 dB or 20 dB. Selecting transformer ratio, setting a particular gain at the first and a separate gain at the second stage gives the user a huge palette of sonic options.

lution recording. I used the L-408s and a pair of Earthworks SR-77s to record a Taylor 514-CE acoustic guitar at 96 kHz and had stellar results. The resolution and detail of the pres are amazing, especially in the bottom end. Although I was never disappointed with the performance of this pre, I had the best results using it to record cello (with a Royer SF-1A), violin (also with the Royer), acoustic guitar (with the Earthworks SR-77s), drum overheads (with a Royer SF-12) and vocals (with a Sony C-800G and a Brauner VM-1KHE).

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The L-409 is reminiscent of a vintage Class A mic preamp. Though it sounds like neither, its performance reminds me of falling somewhere between an API and a Neve 1081. This becomes more true the harder the input is driven and the more colored the sound becomes. I found this pre to work wonders on kick drum (with an AKG D112 and a beyerdynamic M-88), snare drum (with a Shure SM57), electric guitars (with a Royer R-122) and vocals (with the Blue Cactus).

The 1U rack unit (\$99) fits three units horizontally; one power supply and two mic preamps. The 3U rack unit (\$119) fits ten units vertically; one power supply and nine mic preamps or two power supplies and eight mic preamps. There is also a lunch box option (similar to the API Lunchbox) that mounts the power supply and mic preamps vertically.

The L-408 features an input transformer with a 200 kHz bandwidth and an acceptable input level of up to +16 dBu and the input transformer featured with the L-409 has an 80 kHz bandwidth and an acceptable input level of up to +29 dBu. Both preamplifiers have front panel switchable, two position turn ratio transformers. Each transformer has a different core and therefore sounds different.

In most instances, when comparing the two preamps, my ear was drawn to the sound of the L-409 over the sound of the L-408. There were several times though that I preferred the L-408, typically those instances when a purer, less colored sound was desired. In my mind, the optimum preamp palette would be a pair of each mounted in one of the 3RU rack units.

IN USE

I've been fortunate to be able to have a pair of L-408s and a pair of L-409s to use over the past two months now and I've been astounded with their performance. The preamps look great, are easy to use, and once you get the feel for their flexibility, they offer a wide variety of sonic textures that are quick and easy to dial in. Thinking of a mic pre having two stages is a bit bizarre at first but once you hear the difference in how each stage effects the sound, it becomes second nature to quickly push one stage harder while pushing the other stage less. The same is true with choosing the selection of the first or second turn ratio on the transformer. The metering is accurate and easy to monitor and quickly lets you see how hard each stage is being pushed and the controls are beautifully designed to feel comfortable to the touch and quick to adjust.

The L-408 is one of the finest clean-sounding mic preamps that I've ever encountered. The 200 kHz bandwidth of the pre makes it a perfect choice for high-reso-

SUMMARY

After spending a significant amount of time with both the L-408 and the L-409, I'm extremely impressed with both units. Though they are identical in operation they perform quite differently and they each have an extreme sonic palette. Either mic pre would find itself welcome in the equipment arsenal of the most critical professional.

Russ Long owns The Carport studio in Nashville.

Fast Facts

Applications:

Studio, broadcast, post production

Key Features:

Two-channel; level control; 10 dB, 20 dB pad; phase reverse; Class A; LED meters

Price:

L-408 - \$995, L-409 - \$1,095

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