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[] MIC PREAMPS [/] REVIEWS / CATEGORY / MIC-PREAMPS []

Black Lion Audio (<http://www.blacklionaudio.com/>): B173 mic preamp

REVIEWED BY PETE WEISS [/] REVIEWS / BY / PETE-WEISS []

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Lately, Chicago-based Black Lion Audio has been earning praise for its sensibly-priced homages to classic audio gear. In particular, the B12A preamp, a half-rack-format API-inspired mic preamp, has been turning heads for its high quality and similarity to the API, as well as for its surprising affordability.

Now there's Black Lion's B173 Class A mic preamp, tipping its hat to the mic input section of the Neve 1073 channel module. Neve 1073s have long been highly prized for their big, in-your-face sound, and their steep price tag on the vintage-gear market reflects this. The B173 has a very low price, which suggests a target audience of smaller home studios looking for an economical way to achieve "the Neve sound."

The review unit I was sent was a very early production model and did not come with documentation or instructions, so I tried it out on some sessions, using common audio sense, and hey, it worked fine! The sound was as creamy and full as would be expected from a device based on a 1073. I'm lucky to work at Verdant Studio which has a vintage Neve desk with 33114 modules - not exactly the same as a 1073, but of the same species for sure. So I'm used to "that sound," and I have to say, the B173 has "that sound." Running it through the paces, I found there was plenty of gain, and it was very easy to set levels with the ruggedly-stepped Soundwell input attenuator. Vocals exhibited an ideal fullness, electric guitars were beefy, and ribbon mics had plenty of gain. The noise floor, even with the gain pinned, seemed very, very low to my ears.

Most of today's standard mic preamp accoutrements were present and easy to access on the front panel - phantom power, polarity reversal, and a switchable 1/4" DI input. Popping the top and looking around inside the review unit, I saw the B173 was well made and with decent components - the transformers being CineMag for input and EDCOR for output. In the spirit of classic Neve gear, there were no chips that I could see, and the layout was neat and somewhat artful.

While I am very impressed with the quality and price of the B173, I do have a few misgivings, although they tend to boil down to personal taste in ergonomics, and I don't consider them deal-breakers. Still, I should mention that I'm not a fan of the half-rack space format (though I understand some folks love it). To me, half-rack gear complicates mounting options, and I tend to feel like I'm being coerced into buying a second unit to cleanly mount them both in a standard 19" rack. (Of course, having a pair of B173s in a single rackspace would certainly be a nice thing.) Also, on the back of the unit, the input is an XLR jack, while the output is a

1/4" jack. I'm not sure why this is, but there must be a reason. I found it a bit odd and wondered why the output would not be an XLR. That's about it for beefs. Overall, I think Black Lion Audio has come up with a great, affordable design that would be welcome in a variety of tracking rooms. (\$499 street; www.blacklionaudio.com)



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BY NATHAN ELDRED (/REVIEWS/BY/NATHAN-ELDRED)

Right from the start, I noticed that the Old School Audio MP1-A (\$499) has an extended, "airy" top and sounds flat and accurate in the low end with very little coloration. Compared to the other two...

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BY MIKE CAFFREY (/REVIEWS/BY/MIKE-CAFFREY)

Have you noticed how some manufacturers consistently hit home runs with their gear designs? I think there are lots of things that manufacturers with this success rate have in common: high standards,...

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DTC Double Channel Strip (/Reviews/Gear/48/Dtc-Double-Channel-Strip/)

BY PETE WEISS (/REVIEWS/BY/PETE-WEISS)

MindPrint has recently unleashed a few nifty devices of the "channel strip" variety, and the DTC (Dual Tube Channel), designed with the help of award-winning Euro guitarist Thomas Blug and Hughes...

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BY JOHN BACCIGALUPPI (/REVIEWS/BY/JOHN-BACCIGALUPPI), LARRY CRANE (/REVIEWS/BY/LARRY-CRANE)

I've been curious about PreSonus products for a while, as PreSonus make a nice selection of lower-cost yet well- designed audio gear that is built in the U.S. The Eureka is a single-rackspace channel...

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5051 Mono Valve Processor (/Reviews/Gear/37/5051-Mono-Valve-Processor/)

BY STEVE MCALLISTER (/REVIEWS/BY/STEVE-MCALLISTER)

I added this box to my rack for a two-month testing period and was impressed right from the start. It's pretty much a 2U channel strip with preamp, compressor, gate, and EQ sections. At first I was...

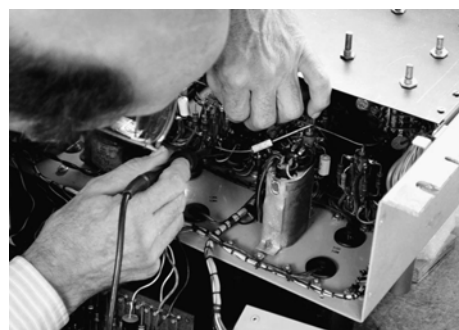
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BY MIKE JASPER (/ARTICLES/BY/MIKE-JASPER)

Jim Williams has spent much of his 56 years working with some of the biggest names in the music business, including Frank Zappa, John McLaughlin and Stevie Wonder. He's the owner of Audio Upgrades,...

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BY JOHN BACCIGALUPPI (/ARTICLES/BY/JOHN-BACCIGALUPPI), LARRY CRANE (/ARTICLES/BY/LARRY-CRANE)

Bill Cheney and Jim Romney are the men responsible for keeping the amazing legacy of Spectra Sonics, a legendary, if criminally unheralded, pro-audio company alive.



(/interviews/btg/102/bill-cheney/)

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Rich Williams: Behind The Gear With Burl Audio (/Interviews/105/Rich-Williams/)

BY LARRY CRANE (/ARTICLES/BY/LARRY-CRANE)

Burl Audio, under the direction of owner/designer Rich Williams, has developed some of the best new recording equipment over the last eight years. Their mic preamps, summing amps, and control room...



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