

Sonic Farm Pro Audio Creamer + Microphone Preamp

This “masterpiece” of a preamp ranges from slightly to massively colored, always warm and musical, and just may curb your EQ habit.

I suspect that most of *PAR*'s readers are as unfamiliar with Sonic Farm Pro Audio as was I before encountering the fabulous Creamer nearly two years ago. The company traces its roots back to the mid-'60s on the former Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast. That's when the mutual love of music and passion to pursue sonic perfection brought Zoran Todorovic and Boris Drazic together.

Initially, they played together in bands, but by the early 1980s they had built their first 8-track studio. By 1984, they had designed and built a 24-track recording console. The duo's engineering and production work grew and flourished, but Yugoslavia was simultaneously collapsing, unfortu-

ately colored, always warm and musical. Creamer+ microphone preamplifier. Based on the performance of this masterpiece, I am eager to see what the future holds for this company. The Creamer+ is a hybrid mic pre that incorporates no negative feedback and utilizes both tubes and solid-state components in its signal path, while allowing

sively colored, always warm and musical.

Features

The Creamer+ is well designed with excellent build quality and is offered in three variations: Creamer A has two Ni-Fe alloy core output transformers, Creamer B has two pure steel core output transformers, and Creamer AB features one of each [channel 1 with Ni-Fe transformer and channel 2 with pure steel]. The standard Creamer (in contrast to the Creamer+) is also available at a slightly lower price; the former is lacking the 1:1 transformer on each input (allowing the Creamer+ to be used as a line-level input device), the FAT



Sonic Farm's Creamer+

nately. Eventually, the country's civil war forced them to leave their homeland.

Next, Zoran spent 15 years running a recording studio in Los Angeles, while Boris spent several years in Germany working on recording and live music projects before relocating to Canada. In 2009, the two were reunited in Vancouver where Sonic Farm was born.

Sonic Farm's debut product is the

the output to be switched between solid-state and transformer output. Additionally, the preamp can be switched between pentode and triode tube mode, providing four unique preamp sounds ensuring that the device will not just suffice for virtually any sound source, but actually excel and — unlike the plethora of clinically transparent mic preamps floating around these days — the Creamer ranges from slightly to mas-

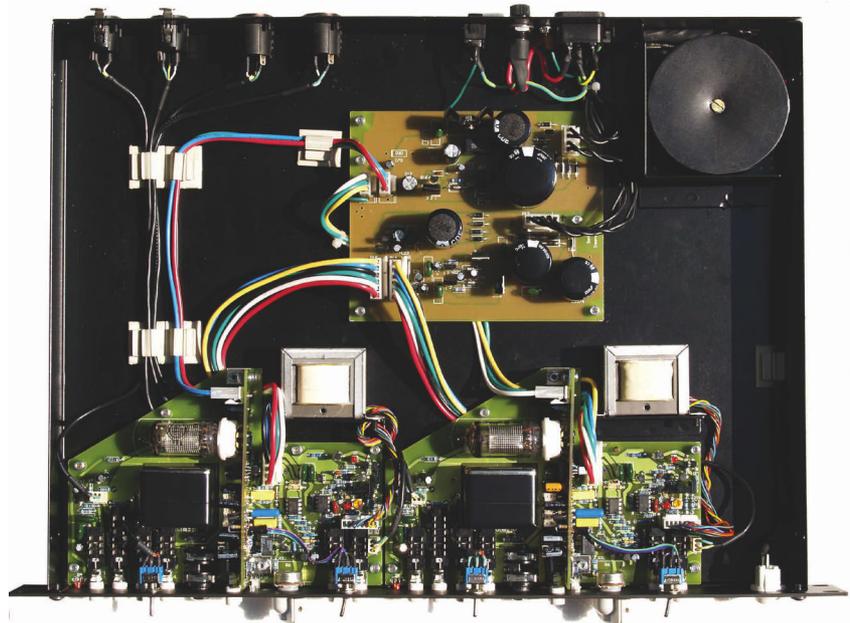
and AIR shelf boosts, and output attenuation.

Creamer+'s chicken-head knobs and black and red faceplate give it a classic look. It has a 10 Hz-50 kHz (+/- 3 dB) frequency response, maximum gain of 74 dB and a 22 dBu maximum output level with a minimum output load of 600 Ohms. With the exception of quarter-inch instrument inputs found on the front panel, all

Creamer+ I/O connections are found on the rear panel. This includes power input, ground lift switch, a pair of XLR microphone inputs, a pair of XLR line inputs and a pair of XLR line outputs.

The front panel packs wide-ranging variability into a single rack space. A large power switch toggles the power on and off. Each channel includes five toggle switches and eight push-button switches. The toggle switches include FAT (a low-frequency shelving boost starting at either 400 or 600 Hz), AIR (a high-frequency shelving boost starting at either 2.2 kHz or 7 kHz), IMP (switches microphone input impedance between 900, 2,400, and 10,000 Ohms), HP (activates 6 dB/octave high-pass filter cutoff frequency at either 80 Hz or 160 Hz) and ATT (for attenuation, offering three levels of output: 0, -6, and -12dB).

Push-button switches activate +48v phantom power; a -15 dB pad (pre-transformer); a +6 dB input transformer gain step-up (from 20 to 26 dB); line or instrument input select; Tube Mode switches between triode and pentode mode (pentode has 33 dB of gain versus triode's 24 dB); Gain Up (5 dB boost in triode mode, 9 dB in pentode mode); SS/OT (solid-state or transformer output selection); and 0 (output polarity reversal). I've found the FAT, AIR and HP circuits to be extremely musical,



A look at the premium components within the Creamer+

In Use

Once you become accustomed to using the Creamer+, it's amazing at how much sonic flexibility it provides without having to use a separate equalizer. The frequencies and slopes associated with the FAT, AIR and HP controls were obviously meticulously selected and are extremely natural and musical. One thing that is slightly confusing is the Creamer+'s impedance switching. While the three-position switch typi-

cally switches between 900, 2,400, and 10,000 Ohms, these values change when the +6 gain switch and/or pad is activated. I just switched through all three impedance options every time I was dialing in a sound and went with what sounded best to my ears. Those anal-retentive engineers amongst us will be pleased to know that the Creamer can be ordered with custom impedance values.

Creamer for literally hundreds of hours, and my results have been simply wonderful in nearly every instance. Drums shine through the Creamer. I've used the box on kick and snare (via AKG D 112 and Heil PR 22, respectively) and had fantastic results; I love using the box to oversaturate the snare. Toms (via Mojave MA100 small-diaphragm tube condensers) also sound great through the Creamer. Yet where this preamp truly shines on the drum kit is overheads; with a pair of sE RN17 small-diaphragm condenser microphones, I had great results with the preset completely flat in triode mode with the solid-state output. With an AEA A440 ribbon pair, I preferred the preamp in pentode mode with the AIR shelf in position 2 and the HP in position 1. The preamp worked equally well with a Royer SF-1A stereo ribbon microphone to record tambourine and shaker.

Electric guitars record extremely well via Creamer. I primarily used it on guitar cabinets via Royer's ubiquitous R-122 ribbon; I was happy that there wasn't just one setting that worked well, but the solid-state or transformer output and the triode or pentode mode each sounded great in different applications. When doubling a guitar part, I found that switching from one output mode to another would provide a great variance

giving enough tone-shaping flexibility to avoid the need for EQ in most situations.

The input of the Creamer+ utilizes the high saturation threshold of an oversized Cinemag transformer; it steps up the mic signal by a switchable 20 or 26 dB. The instrument input goes directly to the tube, where it sees an input impedance similar to that of a tube guitar amp. The mic pre's EF86 pentode tube operating in Class-A is the Creamer's only active gain stage.

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In the last several months, I've used the



to the original track. This was especially useful when recording players with only one guitar (as I often like to switch guitars for a double).

The instrument input is great for capturing bass guitar and keyboards: both really shine through the Creamer. Synth sounds can often be sterile, but the Creamer will transform even the most generic pad into a beautiful sonic texture.

Most notably, vocals via Creamer are superb! With it, I've recorded male and female vocals using a wide variety of condenser and dynamic mics (Sony C-800G, AEA A440, Shure SM7B and ADK GK67) and have had fabulous results in every instance.

I initially had the Creamer+ AB (one Ni-Fe alloy and one steel core output transformer) for the review period, which I loved, but I found that I missed being able to use the box as a stereo device while utilizing the output transformers (the AB version can be used in stereo while operating in solid-state mode). While the majority of users (Sonic Farm says 90 percent) prefer the 100 percent Fe transformer, I found

that I preferred the softer high-end of the Ni-Fe transformer in most situations, so I went with Creamer+ A and I couldn't have been more pleased with the results. The 100 percent Fe variation is further from the solid-state mode tonally, so users wanting the highest amount of sonic deviation in a

The Creamer will ultimately find its way into many mixing and mastering facilities, too.

single box should consider the B version, though I couldn't be more pleased with the performance of the A version.

Summary

With most preamps that I've used that have multiple sonic options, I usually discover after a couple of uses that I pre-

fer them in a specific configuration (e.g., high-impedance). This is not true with the Creamer. Each time I use this device, I compare the "thicker, fuller" pentode and "more aggressive" triode modes and transformer and solid-state outputs. While all four results are always good, one always rises to the top, and it's surprisingly different nearly every time.

As great as the Creamer+ is as a mic pre, in my experience it is equally superb as a line-level tone-shaping tool. I've fallen in love with the sound of this box strapped across my stereo bus; I believe it will ultimately find its way into many mixing and mastering facilities, too.

Thanks to the Creamer's wonderful sound, quiet operation and extreme sonic variation, it is an excellent choice for any studio looking to significantly expand its preamp palette with one purchase.

Prices: \$2,125 and \$2,650 (Creamer and Creamer+, respectively)

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