

Biggie Small

ULTRASOUND CP-100

ACOUSTIC GUITAR AMPLIFIER BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

THE APPEAL OF small acoustic guitar amps is obvious to anyone who's ever played an intimate venue or rehearsed with a band, or who generally treasures the portability of the acoustic guitar. But those same lilliputian marvels do have some glaring inherent weaknesses—primarily the inability to produce much bass or volume. Sometimes you're better off turning off the amp and playing harder!

The compact CP-100 is Ultrasound's latest answer to these difficulties. With 100 watts and a closed-back cabinet containing an eight-inch driver and a tweeter, this pint-sized two-channel amp with onboard digital effects delivers tone, clarity and headroom to spare—and it weighs just 31 pounds.

Controls and Connections

The CP-100's top control panel is recessed, a small detail that makes the amp look elegant and—more importantly—allows you to carry it by the handles without shredding your knuckles against the knobs. Here you'll find inputs and controls for channels 1 and 2. Both inputs use combination XLR and 1/4-inch jacks, which makes it easy to accommodate pickups and mics as well as preamps with balanced outputs.

Channel 1 is designed primarily for mics and as a secondary guitar input. The 1/4-inch portion of the input jack has a 22kOhm input. (Input impedance for each channel's XLR is 2.2kOhm.) Channel 1's



controls include volume, bass (fl12dB at 150Hz) and treble (fl12dB at 5kHz). This channel is always on, so if you're not using it, you'll need to turn its volume control all the way

down to play at the quietest level.

Channel 2 has a 1 MegaOhm input and is voiced for guitar pickups. In addition to featuring volume and EQ controls with the same specs as Channel 1, Channel 2 offers a feedback-fighting, switchable notch filter, continuously variable between 100 and 350Hz. There's also a shape switch that boosts lows (100Hz) and upper mids (3kHz) by 5dB while taking a 5dB bite out of the mid-range at 1.5kHz.

The master section includes controls for the digital effects (which can be assigned to either channel or both) and the master volume control. The effects section has 16 presets accessed with a rotary knob. These include room, hall and plate reverbs, delay, chorus, flange, and rotary speaker, and combinations of chorus and reverb. You can't edit these effects, but you can adjust the dry/wet balance.

All connections other than the guitar inputs are in the rear: XLR direct out; a 1/4-inch line out; mono 1/4-inch effects send and return jacks; a pair of RCA inputs designated for tape deck or CD player (with a screw operated trim control) and a jack for an optional effects footswitch.

Sound

I tested the CP-100 with guitars ranging from a Taylor 815ce equipped with a Fishman Prefix Blender to a Martin Backpacker, but it was the former—with heavy strings and tuned down a whole step—that really put this compact amp through its paces. The CP-100 delivered the guitar's prodigious lows and shimmering highs in all their solid, punchy (but not boomy) glory, with plenty of ringing overtones.

The Ultrasound's high headroom and ability to handle attack transients without compressing the sound or getting distorted really allows you to dig in and express yourself. Whether you pick with skin or nail, play Doc Watson-smooth lead lines or snap the strings with Mississippi Delta force, the CP-100 will transmit everything with the faithfulness

of a Steinway grand piano soundboard.

The CP-100 gets plenty loud. You can ride its volume controls across their full range—there is

a difference between "8" and "10." The EQ is basic, but well able to elicit different aspects of the guitar's character. The notch filter, though designed primarily as a feedback suppressant, does color the sound (and, when set to higher frequencies, adds some hiss). With the Backpacker (which has a passive piezo and no controls of its own) plugged into Channel 2, the EQ made it possible to dial up a sound more like a full-bodied instrument's with a warm midrange—in contrast to the travel guitar's characteristic banjo-like tone.

The Bottom Line

The CP-100 delivers top-shelf amplified acoustic guitar tone. It did a great job with guitars as disparate as a high-end jumbo and a diminutive travel guitar. This amp is certain to impress even the most hardened proponents of the notion that size matters. ■

List Price: \$978
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