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The Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2 is a half-rack microphone preamplifier & EQ.



Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2 Preamp Review

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About the Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2

Other than being a mouthful to say, the DRS-Q4M mk2 packs a ton of functionality into a half-rack chassis. The unit functions as both a microphone preamplifier and EQ, both of which have a distinct sound in the mid-range channel strip market. The preamplifier section offers levels up to +26 dBu @ 1kHz, powered by 100% discrete, Class A circuitry. In addition to standard features like phantom power and a phase flip, the DRS-Q4M has a switchable high-pass filter, ground lift, and DI functionality for as much flexibility as possible when recording. The device's EQ circuitry offers four bands of semi-parametric equalization, which is engaged using the "EQL" switch on the front of the

unit. The low and high bands are shelving EQs, while the mid bands offer a standard Bell curve.

The Preamp

The preamp section provides two stages of gain with independent controls. The first knob can be switched in increments of 5 dB, ranging from -30 to -70 dB of gain. This knob acts as a line level sensitivity input when the Mic/Line switch is engaged, allowing users a more suitable level should they choose to use the unit's EQ as post-processing.

The preamp sounds very clean, providing a bit of harmonic distortion when pushed harder. For lower level microphones such as ribbons, some additional gain may be desired before

hitting the preamp. The unit handles pressure well, with noise floor only noticeable in the highest amplification settings. The preamps discrete circuitry ensures a clean, analog sound by passing the audio through minimal, necessary components.

On the way out of the box, the DRS-Q4M offers a continuously variable output gain stage. Featuring a slightly smaller knob on the front panel, users can choose to leave it around noon for minimal coloration, and even use it to cleanly ride levels going into their recording. The knob proved to be very transparent when tested on dynamic sources, allowing me to do some reduction on peaks in a vocal take without running the vocal through a compressor.

Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2 Preamp Review (continued)

The EQ

As far as equalization goes, this is one of the best boxes I've used to add some air and top-end shine into my recordings. With 4 bands of EQ, users can boost or cut frequencies up to 16 dB. Like the input gain, the EQ knobs are notched at fixed amounts, allowing for easy recall and noticeable variation. While there were a few occasions I had wished a could get a narrower cut, the notches never seemed to be too hard to work with. Plus, if you ever get stuck on where to start with the EQ, Phoenix Audio provides several starting suggestions in their included Owner's Manual.

The high band offers a switch to boost or cut at either 10kHz or 15kHz, which is slightly lower than what was expected. The 15 kHz setting added plenty of air to vocals and acoustic instruments, even with as little as two notches of gain (roughly 3 dB). The high-mid band offers 3-switchable positions at 6, 3, or 1.6 kHz. I couldn't get much from it when it came to boosting anything, although it did come in handy with removing a few trouble frequencies and making a bit of a dip to make low-mid or high boosts more noticeable.

The low-mid EQ gave me everything I really need in a good additive equalizer. While the switch only offers equalization at 800, 400, and 200 Hz, it was enough to add some punch to snare drums and presence to any vocal performance. Again, a difference could be heard with minimal boosting/cutting. Finally the low frequencies offer a bit of a trick for users. The high-pass filter starts rolling off pretty drastically from 120 Hz down, leaving two of the three low band frequencies in that range. Users can select 130, 80, or 40 Hz, and should expect to do some extra boosting than with the other bands if utilizing the high-pass filter. The 16dB is

certainly more than enough to give your kick drum an extra bit of thump.

The Verdict

The Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2 definitely gives other channel strips a run for their money. Being able to have a reliable EQ is essential when perfecting something as important as a lead vocal, and the EQ on this unit doesn't fail to deliver. Judging the preamp alone, the sound is a bit cleaner than other preamps on the market, which is why the EQ is great to add some color. Still, clean amplification in a half rack unit is great and will fit in with most styles. Delicate enough to use on soft instruments and powerful enough to handle any loud source you can cram into it, the DRS-Q4M will always give you a great result.

For more information on the Phoenix Audio DRS-Q4M mk2, please check out their [product page](#).