

# ACTIVE PREAMPS PRODUCT



If you are in the market for a dedicated stage or studio or acoustic guitar preamp/DI, Mark Tucker investigates the cream of the crop.

To continue with the second part of our three-part DI Round-Up, in this issue we are looking at active and dedicated acoustic preamps/DIs. These come in varying forms but normally offer assorted combinations of microphone preamp(s), equalisation, filtering, and possibly other extras such as ground lift, pre/post-EQ functions and boost functions etc. These types of preamp are generally capable of handling pretty much any instrument signal, whether it be piezo or battery/active and powered systems. They come in varying designs, from small boxes to a heavier standard floor stomp-box design.



Price: £180

## ORCHID ELECTRONICS 'ACOUSTIC GUITAR PREAMP'

[www.orchid-electronics.co.uk](http://www.orchid-electronics.co.uk)  
Orchid are a West Country-based company who have carved an enviable reputation among many professional names in the acoustic world. With their ever-increasing range, all Orchid products are designed for simplicity, ease of use, reliability and purity of tone. For those of you who want a good-value, high-quality and bespoke UK hand-built product, Orchid are a strong contender.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** Removable clamp to fix to a microphone boom stand for easy tweaking of your sound and settings; dedicated three-way EQ especially designed for acoustic instruments; HF: 10K, MF: 1K, LF: 80Hz; volume control; silent muting switch; tuner output; XLR out; requires phantom power; high-quality parts used throughout; 1M output; suitable for most pickup types.  
**Weight:** 490g  
**Dimensions:** 150 x 110 x 65mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Excellent clean and natural sound. Can be mounted to mic stand for easy adjustment. Great value.  
**Cons:** None.  
**Overall:** A very good value, well-designed, hand-built, simple-to-use product.

### Acoustic rating out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★



Price: £175

## LR BAGGS 'PARA DI'

[www.lrbaggs.com](http://www.lrbaggs.com)  
LR Baggs is a name synonymous with the acoustic guitar. Their pickups have been tried and tested by many big names in acoustic music. The Para DI is the most compact of the preamps/DIs tested here, with its larger more stage-friendly 'Venue DI' (not reviewed) being its bigger brother. The Para DI's functions include comprehensive 4-band EQ with sweepable mids and sweepable notch filter; tonal sculpting was a breeze.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** Low EQ band control: 85Hz, notch control and tune knob; 98 to 247Hz, mid-range control; 400Hz to 1.6kHz, and tune knob, presence control 5kHz, treble control; 10kHz, 24db of adjustable gain with low-noise circuitry; high impedance input of 10M allows compatibility of any pickup type; high current buffered output to power long cables without signal and quality loss; effects loop; 1/4" output; invert/polarity switch; phantom or battery power (200hrs user time); phantom power LED; balanced XLR output; external battery access compartment; battery status LED.  
**Weight:** 410g  
**Dimensions:** 42 x 91 x 48mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Good sound with plenty of tonal adjustment.  
**Cons:** Adjustment may be a little fiddly with sausage fingers.  
**Overall:** A good, compact and powerful design.

### Acoustic rating out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★



Price: £350

## RADIAL 'PZ PRE'

[www.tonebone.com](http://www.tonebone.com)  
As I mentioned in the previous review in *Acoustic*, the Radial PZ Pre is built to withstand a nuclear war. It has more functions and switchability than most other similar offerings, with functions such as boost and true stereo/twin channel inputs. It also sounds great! Radial have a superb design team who take on board critical feedback from pro users – this shows in their designs.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** 2 x inputs; input select switch for independent settings; PZB boosters in each input for high-quality sound with piezo pickups; blend which allows you to accept two sources and mix the two channels together; high-pass filter; notch filter with sweepable EQ and two different Qs; semi-parametric EQ; 180° phase reverse; power booster for soloing or add-in effects using the inserts; send and receive jacks; mute and tuner out; buffered instrument out; balanced DI outputs (equipped with two direct boxes/pre and post EQ).  
**Weight:** 500g  
**Dimensions:** 205 x 110 x 51mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Great clean sound with plenty of tonal adjustment. Very strong build.  
**Cons:** The need for an external PSU.  
**Overall:** A powerful and flexible DI/preamp.

### Acoustic rating out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★

# ROUND-UP PART II

ACOUSTIC MAGAZINE  
GIVES YOU THE LOW DOWN



Price: £229

## BBE 'ACOUSTIMAX SONIC MAXIMIZER DI'

[www.bbesound.com](http://www.bbesound.com)  
Distributed by FCN Music, [www.fcnmusic.co.uk](http://www.fcnmusic.co.uk), BBE are known for their professional audio equipment, normally found in recording studios and installed into large PA systems. Built to the highest audio specifications, the Acoustimax offers the bonus processing power of the classic BBE Sonic Maximizer, which uses phase correction to improve both low-end and higher frequencies.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** 3-band recording-console quality EQ with a sweepable mid range; low-frequency notch filter; phase reversal; ground lift; line level out; dedicated tuner out; TRS effects loop; pre/post switchable balanced DI output with pad; hardwire bypass; non-slip rubber bottom; 12V power supply included.

**Weight:** Unknown

**Dimensions:** 215 x 50 x 140 x 70mm (to top of pots)

### What we think

**Pros:** Excellent clean sound with huge amount of tonal adjustment. Very strong design.

**Cons:** The need for an external PSU.

**Overall:** A very powerful and flexible DI/preamp.

**Acoustic rating** out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★



Price: £175

## D-TAR 'MAMA BEAR'

[www.d-tar.com](http://www.d-tar.com)  
The Mama Bear uses AGE technology, where digital sampling has enabled D-TAR to sample 16 traditional acoustic guitar tones. All tonal adjustment is made via the input source and target instrument controls. The sound quality is very good, but it's something you'll probably either like or not. The absence of a real tone knob or fader unsettles me. The D-TAR would not be my first choice for live work, yet it could sit happily in a studio and produce an excellent range of acoustic guitar tones.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** 16-position input source selector; 16-position target instrument switch; input gain control with red overload LED; bypass switch with LED indicator when in bypass mode; output level control; balanced XLR output; Hi-Z input stage; chassis compatible with Equinox and Solstice rack systems; +/- 12-volt supply for analogue stages; wet/dry blend control; ground lift switch; phase switch; mute switch.

**Weight:** 1.2kg

**Dimensions:** 216 x 159 x 69mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Great clean sound with plenty of different tone settings.

**Cons:** The need for an external PSU and 19" rack.

**Overall:** Wide range of tones produced via digital emulation, probably best suited to a studio.

**Acoustic rating** out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★



Price: £150

## FISHMAN 'PLATINUM PRO EQ'

[www.fishman.com](http://www.fishman.com)  
Yet another name synonymous with the acoustic musician, Fishman have built some classics in their time. The Platinum Pro EQ is a compact and efficient little box. It feels and looks substantial, with a solid build and recessed controls. Simply laid out and easy to use, it delivers a high-quality sound packed with a plethora of functions and tonal adjustments.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** 4-band acoustic EQ with sweepable mid range; feedback-fighting phase switch and notch filter; XLR DI (with ground lift and pre/post switches) for pro sound and recording; Smooth Control – Fishman's acoustic compression smoothes out amplified acoustic sound; exclusive voltage doubler circuit – for more clarity and greater dynamics; easy-access battery compartment; tuner/send output; input gain and master volume controls; rugged injection-moulded case; 3-way power from 9V battery, 48V phantom or AC adapter.

**Weight:** Unknown

**Dimensions:** 140 x 90 x 40mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Relatively compact, great clean sound, with plenty of tonal adjustment including compression. Very strong design.

**Cons:** None.

**Overall:** Simple to use, producing an honest and clean sound.

**Acoustic rating** out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★



Price: £199

## HEADWAY 'EDB-1'

[www.headwaymusicaudio.com](http://www.headwaymusicaudio.com)  
Distributed by Sutherland Trading. Tel: 02920 887 333. The EDB-1 marks a new direction for Headway; so far, they have manufactured only acoustic amps and pickups. This little box certainly delivers some punch. A huge list of functions, including stereo inputs, mic preamp (XLR input), selectable impedance input and sweepable filter with Q width, makes the EDB-1 unique and very special. With highest-quality components, the sound produced is superb, and it can fit into your guitar case.

### Technical Specifications

**Features:** Pro audio quality; mono/stereo jack inputs; XLR input; input impedance switchable to optimise various pickup types; 3-way 'range' control selects high-pass filter (low-cut settings, between guitar, violin or bass); 2 channels; 5-band interactive EQ; switchable and tunable notch filter with variable band width; phantom power to inputs via switch; balanced XLR line out (mix of 2 channels); earth lift switch; jack line out (mono mix of 2 channels); battery or external DC plug in power supply; low-battery indicator; mount via rubber feet, belt clip, or optional mic stand bracket.

**Weight:** 500g

**Dimensions:** 138 x 93 x 38mm

### What we think

**Pros:** Feature packed, compact design, great clean sound.

**Cons:** None.

**Overall:** Easy to use, producing an honest sound with plenty of tonal adjustment.

**Acoustic rating** out of five

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★