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Avedis Audio Electronics MD7

More than a mic preamp, this 500 Series module has lots of tricks up its sleeve

REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

We were first introduced to Avedis Kifedjian and his firm Avedis Audio Electronics back in our April 2017 issue, when we looked at the popular E27 500 Series EQ. Before branching out under his own name, Avedis got his start working as the lead tech at BAE (in both the Brent Averill Electronics and the British Audio Engineering days); he is responsible for some of that company's best-known designs.

In addition to the E27 EQ, the most popular product under the Avedis banner is the MA5 Neve 1073-inspired 500 Series microphone preamp. This month we take a look at the second preamp in the Avedis line, one that has its roots deep in Mr. Kifedjian's early work with Brent Averill.

Meet the MD7

The MD7 is a single-channel 500 Series module. It comes dressed in flat black with white and red nomenclature and accents, using the same dual concentric controls as found on the E27, each with a stepped outer ring and a continuous inner knob.

Below the I/O dial, which we'll examine in greater depth in a moment, are four high-quality push buttons for phantom power (complete with a red indicator LED), phase reverse, a gently sloped high pass filter (-3 dB @ 80 Hz), and a button to switch between the microphone input and a 1/4" unbalanced DI input. Also on the front panel is a curious 1/4" jack labeled Send... more on that below as well.

The MD7's all-discrete preamp design is built around Avedis' now-famous homegrown 1122 op amp. The 1122 has been, and still is, featured in numerous BAE products, as well as Avedis' own line. (Avedis himself gave us some great insights on the 1122 in an interview that ran as part of the April 2017 E27 review.) The MD7 also makes use of a Jensen JT-3515-APC transformer on its input, coupled to a beefy JT-CX2914 transformer on the output.

The input of the MD7 ranges from 0 dB up to 64 dB, controlled in 4 dB increments by the stepped outer silver ring of the dual concentric input control. The rectangular red inner knob handles input trim, but with more than a literal twist.



What's a TransDrive?

The MD7 is the first product to use what Avedis calls TransDrive—in essence, transformer drive. As explained to me by Avedis, op amp-based preamps are by their very design intrinsically loud... often too loud to avoid clipping the inputs on most modern digital interfaces. To address this, most manufacturers typically offer a 10 to 20 dB pad, placed before the input transformer. This is a perfectly reasonable decision that results in a very clean uncolored signal option with a hint of transformer weight.

In Avedis' TransDrive design, he decided to completely eliminate the pad and allow the full input signal to hit the transformer. He then placed the trim pot *after* the transformer to control the overall level and keep from clipping the inputs of the DAW. Levelwise, it's akin to a fader on your console, going from fully open to fully off, which gives the added bonus of being able to mute signal in the unit.

This means you can take full advantage of the Jensen input transformer and saturate away, even to the point of overdrive, although the MD7 is in no way a distortion/grit piece; it gives more of a contained input-stage thickness. Sonically, comparing a pad-based op amp preamp to the MD7 is like comparing a damn fine cup of coffee to a beautifully pulled shot of rich espresso with a nice thick crema. (Sorry, non-coffee-drinkers, this was the best example I could think of.)

The MD7's input can be switched to line level, to interface with your DAW and add some transformer color. In line mode the stepped knob now becomes a -16 to +28 dB line device. Also note that line-level signals still come in through the XLR input of your 500 Series rack, not the 1/4" input on the front. Speaking of which...

Going direct

On its own as a mic preamp, the MD7 is a fantastic piece of kit, but it still has a few more tricks up its sleeve that further expand its utility. Those tricks go with the aforementioned 1/4" input and output.

Using the self-switching 1/4" input makes the MD7 a clean, solid, and forcefully full-sounding direct recording device suitable for guitar, bass, and even keyboards. Said DI features a 10 MΩ input impedance that will please even the most difficult

piezo pickup. While many preamps offer a built-in instrument input, many of the ones on competing preamps—especially low-end interfaces—are often obligatory afterthoughts. As with all Avedis designs, this DI is overbuilt for maximum input and sound quality.

The DI input is after the input transformer section and only makes use of the 1122 op amp and output transformer. Out of the box it is one of the loudest DI/instrument interfaces I have ever used, so much so that it can easily drive an interface into clipping if the instrument is on full. The plus side of this is that it works like a dream on older low-level passive sources, like Fender Rhodes electric pianos and vintage guitars with aged low-output pickups. Avedis does provide an internal attenuation trimpot that you can adjust to find the right level for your studio.

Going out

The unbalanced 1/4" output labeled Send is the final piece of the MD7 puzzle. It is not a simple "through" or

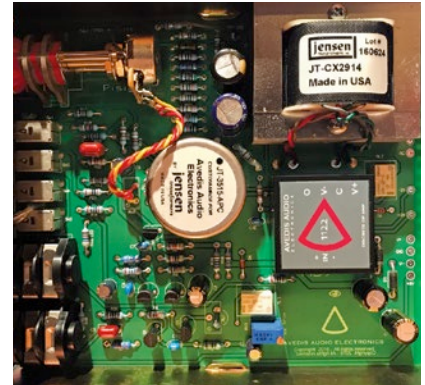
a splitter to feed an amplifier; before a signal hits the Send, it goes through the op amp and transformer. The MD7 can act as a reamplification device; first record the dry guitar using the DI input and send the output to your DAW, then play it back from your DAW into the MD7's Line In and run the signal from the Send jack to your amp.

My favorite use of the MD7, however, is as a guitar pedal interface. It works amazingly well with high-impedance pedals (which require the right levels and impedances to preserve tone) as a send/return effect in your DAW or mixing desk. Usually this requires a pair of devices, so the MD7 is super convenient because it provides the send and return in one unit. I used this exact setup with the Catalinbread pedals reviewed in this issue; it worked flawlessly to add outboard pedal delays and plate reverb to my mixes.

Conclusion

A solid, classic-sounding preamp with the ability to fully load its input

transformer, classic clean DI, and my favorite feature, pedal reamping... all in a 500 Series format for a very reasonable price given its sound quality. What's not to love? In fact, when I saw this box at NAMM last year, I considered it a unique pedal reamping device with the added bonus of a mic preamp. Either way, it's a win-win! ➔



PRICE: \$775

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