



65amps Empire Guitar Amp

The 65amps Empire is a 22-watt amp head designed to produce the sound of several different vintage British amps that use EL34 power tubes. The Empire delivers three distinct sounds or “voices” of Brit amps that appeared from the mid ‘60s up through the ‘90s. The amp uses two 6V6 power tubes and two 12AX7s in the pre-amp and as usual, the devil is in the details.

For over 20 years, 65amps owners Peter Stroud and Dan Boul have modified small American amps (most have 6V6s) to make them sound like old EL34-based English amps. They achieve this by way of unique circuit design and careful component/transformer choices and NOT by simply throwing in a copy of an old amp’s tone stack circuit.

Selectable by the front panel switch or a remote foot pedal, the three sounds are: an early ‘60s Pete Townsend clean tone; a fat and dirty sound you would have heard used between the years ‘68 to ‘72; and a high-gain ‘80s tone. But of course you can use the Bass, Mid and Treble controls plus the unique 65amps Bump switch to take the finished sound anywhere you like for playing crunchy rhythms or your favorite soaring and heroic leads.

I liked that there are three Volume controls to preset the level of each voice—very useful when switching back and forth in live settings. The Empire is also equipped with 65amps’ proprietary Master Voltage feature to deliver classic British sounds at any volume level for concert stage gigs to bedroom practicing back home.

The 65amps Empire sells for \$2,900 MSRP and for more information, go to 65amps.com.

Yamaha GigMaker Drum Kits

GigMaker Kits are for first-time to intermediate players—affordable but well-made and great looking and sounding. The kits feature all Yamaha dual-brace hardware with hex tom-tom ball joints for precise positioning.

There are wood bass drum hoops that match the wooden snare drums and all are wrapped up in your choice of five different glitter wrap finishes. Bass drums come in 20- and 22-inch sizes and all drums are made using basswood and poplar with shells available as shell packs along with complete configuration choices of hardware. You can also buy packaged kits that include Paiste 101 cymbals. Prices range from \$670 MSRP for a five-piece kit to \$1,300 for a complete kit with hardware. Visit yamahadrums.com for more.



JZ Microphones Pop Filter

The state-of-the-art in wind and pop filters for vocal microphones moves forward with Latvia-based JZ Microphones’ latest design. Shielding any mic from a singer’s p-pops has always been a compromise between foolproof protection and minimal sound loss—mostly in the high frequencies. The JZ pop filter has acoustically transparent black metal front and back screens that are fine, cross hatched meshes rotated from one another. Furthermore the screens each have especially designed and complementary contoured wave shapes—smoothly shaped hills and valleys embossed into them. The front and back screens are locked equidistant from a center post—an aiming point for singing directly into the mic.

Plosive bursts of air are trapped within the two screens and are effectively reduced or eliminated altogether—all without changing the sound.

I tested the JZ Microphones Pop Filter while using the new Shure Beta 181 small diaphragm condenser mic. Small diaphragm condenser mics are a worst-case test; they are more sensitive to popping than larger diaphragm mics. It is amazing to me that as hard as I intentionally p-pop, nothing is heard. At the most, the sound of my lips and mouth are heard but no low frequency thumps at all.

The JZ Microphone Pop Filter is small in size and easy to attach and position onto any mic using the attached 45-mm gooseneck and clamp mechanism. One of those “must haves” around the studio, the JZ Pop

Filter sells for \$139 MSRP. For more info, visit jzmicro.com.



Alan Parsons’ Art & Science of Sound Recording

Big kudos go to veteran engineer-producer and recording artist Alan Parsons for all the “love” he put into his monumental opus, *Art & Science of Sound Recording*.

This three DVD set runs just over 10 hours and I enjoyed every second of it. Written and produced by Parsons and Julian Colbeck for KEYFAX NewMedia, it is narrated by actor Billy Bob Thornton and there are notable interviews with many famous artists, musicians and engineer-producer artists like Erykah Badu, Michael MacDonald, John Shanks, Patrick Leonard, Allen Sides, Jack Joseph Puig and more.

What first stuck me about this educational series was the “infotainment” style of presentation and the overall relaxed atmosphere. All the interviewees seem totally at ease and honest during their on-camera conferences with Parsons. So at ease they sometimes readily divulge a few of their coveted secrets. Secondly, these DVDs are expertly produced using widescreen NTSC video, pro-looking lighting, well-written and rehearsed scripts and tutorial animations to explain technical details. I liked the helpful on-screen captions used to decrypt the blizzard of acronyms and buzz words.

While the tradecraft of recording engineering has certain guiding technical principles and rules all engineers must know, Parsons offers that the art lies in how, when and why to adhere or diverge from them. This philosophy, at times, counter-balances the more rigid and judgmental opinions and “pontifications” offered by the some of the other producer-engineer pros he interviews.

Alan Parsons’ *Art & Science of Sound Recording* DVD set is available for \$149 MSRP and includes an eight-page booklet and access to source materials at artandscienceofsound.com. It is aimed at viewers with an intermediate level of understanding of recording engineering and music production. For me, as a recording engineer, it filled in many gaps in knowledge and I especially appreciated the increased visibility and notoriety it brings to the recording engineer-producer profession.



Solid-State-Logic Duende Native Plug-Ins

SSL has made the amazing sounding *Duende* plug-in family now available to all by porting them in full, 64-bit Native VST and AU formats. These DAW processors are identical to the (now discontinued) DSP hardware powered *Duende* plug-ins and, like the originals, offer superior precision with advanced feature sets and the legendary tonal characteristics of the SSL console’s equalizers, gates and compressors.

My most-used *Duende* plug-ins are both modelled after the two SSL console classics: the EQ & Dynamics Channel and the much sought-after Stereo Bus Compressor. But I also never failed to use both the mastering-grade X-EQ and X-Comp plug-ins because they sound and work better and unlike any others I own.

X-EQ is a 10-band equalizer with a built-in spectrum analyzer for checking the frequency spectrum of any sound while X-Comp is a highly configurable compressor/limiter with advanced side chain processing. I use both these plug-ins on every mix because they can be set to process individual tracks in any style I want. You can set them to be subtle, smooth and “high fidelity” sounding all the way to very colorful and distinctive—even rough sounding with a few mouse clicks and drags.

Duende Native also has two more specifically designed processors: Drumstrip and Vocalstrip. As their names imply, these processors make short work of drum and vocal tracks and will replace chains of several plug-ins normally required for the same job. The newest plug-in to the *Duende* family is X-Verb, a reverb with a unique parameter set that sounds like a very good hardware reverb.

All *Duende Native* plug-ins are available for a free, fully functional 30-day demo and can be purchased individually from the SSL Web Store or as bundles. There are the *Native Essentials* with EQ & Dynamics Channel and Stereo Bus Compressor and the *Native Studio Pack* with EQ & Dynamics Channel, Stereo Bus Compressor, Drumstrip, Vocalstrip, X-EQ and X-Comp.

See more at solidstatellogic.com/duende.

