



TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

< **Issue #91** >

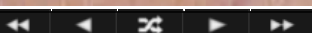
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WA12 Mic Preamp

by **Warm Audio**

REVIEWED BY [ALAN TUBBS](#) · SEPT. 15, 2012

\$449.99 MSRP



Designer/owner Bryce Young describes his Warm Audio WA12 not as a clone of the API 312, but based upon that classic design. It arrived double-boxed, with plenty of packing and peanuts, which is always nice when electronics are shipped. Unpacked, the half-rack Warm preamp is solid, if not especially heavy, considering its depth. Someone with delicate sensibilities might consider the front-panel's orange color scheme garish, but it does stand out against the chorus of grey, silver, and black predominating in most racks. It also makes the black lettering legible, down to the dots used for gain. All six buttons have associated status LEDs, an often overlooked touch, while the paint and external metalwork on my unit showed excellent craftsmanship. All buttons had nice travel and gave a solid latching feel, while the gain knob clicked through the stops with enough pressure to know you've changed settings but not enough to slow things down. Mr. Young explained that it is a variable pot, not a rotary switch, but the indents give it that feel. Rounding out the front panel is the hi-Z input. The only thing missing is any kind of metering. Around back is the 24 volt power inlet, a Neutrik Combo mic input, and two simultaneous outputs, one on XLR and the other 1/4." The rear input is mic-level only, but engaging the front-panel pad button helps match to line-level. Both the hi-Z and mic inputs go through the entire preamp circuitry, including the "Warm" function. The front-panel Warm button changes the impedance of the input from the standard 600 ohm to 150. This can make the tone brighter, as well as add a few extra dB of overall level, so be careful when comparing sounds (because louder will almost always A/B better). Still, such flexibility is always a welcome addition. The power supply is an external wall wart. This helps with isolation, of course, but is also a common way to save money for international electrical certification. Inside, the unit is cleanly built and well specified, including dual Cinemag transformers. It looks good and feels good - and that provides confidence even at this unit's low price.

So, how does the WA12 sound? I set it up and had some colleagues join me during testing. The simplest way to describe guitar DI'd through the WA12 is thick and rich. The strums were full and plucking sharp. But I was really impressed with what the WA12 did for the female vocalist. Normally, I use a small-diaphragm condenser on altos, since the Oktava MK-319 I keep at home will cause sibilance problems with such voices by the time the track is mastered. But I already had the Oktava set up for guitar so I used that for the scratch vocal. The WA12 hinted at less sibilance while sounding "big" - bigger than the Rupert Neve Designs Portico II Channel [Tape Op #82] I usually use. When I brought her back to do overdubs, my suspicions that the Oktava/Warm combo was a perfect fit for her was confirmed. It wasn't that the WA12 rolled off any highs, it was the extended bottom that helped keep the sibilance in check. After recording, I slathered on the digital processing - including Softube FET and SONAR ProChannel PC2A electro-optical on her channel, ProChannel PC4K SSL-style [#88] on the vocal and output buses - and slammed all the comps. Yes, her sss's got aggressive and the T's and other plosives got rock hard and chipped, but once I backed off the settings to something approaching normal, the vocals slid perfectly into the mix - nice and round. The full sound recorded also took EQ extremely well. At a studio with API 3124 preamps, we tried spoken word as well as guitar and bass. It was hard to tell any difference between the two, but after some close listening, it was decided that the Warm Audio had a little more bottom, if only by a red hair.

At home, I can usually get a good drum sound using overheads and a Crown PZM-12SP mic on the floor, all equidistant. Again, the WA12 was a perfect match for the assigned floor job. The PZM provides pristine capture, with the WA12 accentuating the kick and floor tom, yet remaining punchy. Like an API, the output of the Warm Audio is high, and I seldom had to go above the halfway mark (46 dB out of 71 dB of gain). I did go higher, but then found I had to bring down the input

of my interface. No matter how loud the gain, at no point did the WA12 crap out or distort; it just slid into nice transformer saturation. The waveform would get bigger on the computer screen but flat line, as if going through a compressor. The WA12 responds like professional gear, yet does so at an affordable price. And like most professional gear, it gets the job done but excels at certain tasks - like sibilant singers. If you are looking to augment existing API preamps, only your hairdresser will know you are using the Warm Audio unit instead. A project or home studio looking to add a good preamp will find the WA12 capable of providing professional quality without breaking the bank.

(\$449.99 street; www.warmaudio.com) -Alan Tubbs <www.bnoir-film.com>

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MORE GEAR REVIEWS



Germ 500 MKII Pre Amp (500-series)

by Chandler Limited

Adam Kagan · May 15, 2012

Chandler has created a strong following in the niche market of vintage-inspired preamps, compressors, and tone-shaping tools. Wade Goeke has derived modern tools from the original components and...



SuPRE mic preamp by Groove Tubes

Craig Schumacher · Jan. 15, 2008

Following on the heels of the success of the VIPRE, Groove Tubes has created another fantastic tube-based microphone preamplifier. Called the SuPRE, it looks like the twin little brother of the VIPRE....



M-502 PRO preamp & EQ by Spectra Sonics

John Baccigaluppi · July 15, 2012

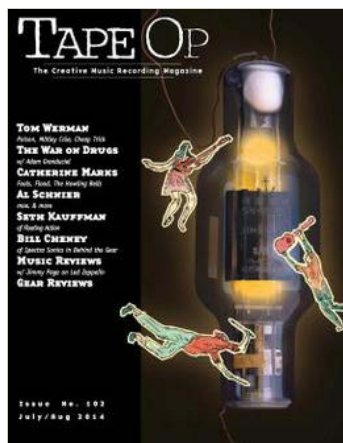
I have not been excited about a new mic preamp in a long time, especially a solid-state one. You know what I mean? Doesn't it feel like in the last 10 years or so, we witnessed an explosion in the mic...



710 Twin-Finity mic preamp & DI

by Universal Audio

Craig Schumacher · March 15, 2009



Two-V dual mic preamp (500-series)

by Rascal Audio

Chris Koltay · July 15, 2014

The Two-V is a double-wide, two-channel



MXPre LC1 mic preamp for Sony MXP-3000 series consoles

by Normaphone

David Barbe · Nov. 15, 2012

So, what is this Twin-Finity bit all about? It's the "two, two, two mints in one" preamp-tube and solid state! This is the perfect preamp for those who want it all, but can't make up their minds....

preamp module for the 500-series format. It comes painted battleship grey with minimal markings denoting the usual features: polarity, high-pass filter, phantom...

I have way too many mic preamps. The problem is that I like lots of different flavors. We have Neve, API, Chandler, Daking, Hardy, Summit, UREI, Sony, Amek - in some cases several different ones of...



Dual99v500 mic preamp & FC500 FET compressor

by JLM Audio

Garrett Haines · Sept. 15, 2011

Back when I reviewed the Eisen Audio DIY500 mic preamp kit (Tape Op #80), I bragged about the beefy monsters we brewed. But shortly after publication, the manufacturer discontinued the kits, leaving...

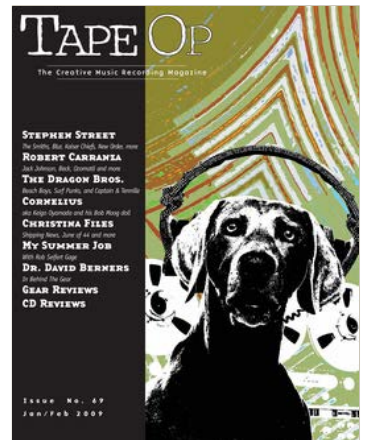


581 500-Series mic preamp, IMOD transformer upgrade, CPS-501 powered chassis

by Chameleon Labs

Thom Monahan · June 3, 2013

It's nice to see something at this price point showing up in the 500-Series world. The 581 is a Class AB, discrete preamp based on the venerable Neve 1081 mic preamp design. It has all your...



Si 500-series mic preamp

by ShinyBox

Joel Hamilton · Jan. 15, 2009

Every time I record something, I am thankful that I have the right tools to simply get things rolling for the client. I don't make them stand around for hours, nor do I need the drummer to play the...

Passive

Active

John Williams said about this:

THU, FEB 14, 2013 - 12:43AM

Nice review, and timely too. I'm checking mic pres currently, and after having stumbled upon the Warm Audio unit only yesterday, I've become interested in any feedback regarding how well it meets real world challenges. Key, for me at least, is the units capacity for quelling sibilance as it's something I need to be guarded about. This may just be an ideal answer to that inconvenience. After having pulled a couple of YT videos down, it's easy to see why everyone characterizes the sound as 'warm and thick'. I like that ... and it'll surely stand out in a rack! Kudos for the review.

Martin Frainer said about this:

WED, SEP 3, 2014 - 11:16AM

Thanks for this great review! I was looking for a warm, creamy and thick sounding preamp for recording drums in my studio and read so much good stuff about the Warm Audio WA12.

I think they're priced well and I also like their funky color. After reading your review I definitely have to check out one and also will try it on leadvocals.

ALL GEAR
REVIEWS

BY
CONTRIBUTOR

BY
ISSUE

WEB
BONUS



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