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Bone-Up Your Tone

The Radial Tonebone PZ-Pre & Radial JDX

Over the past decade, Radial Engineering and its sister brand, Tonebone, have offered direct boxes, re-ampers, tube overdrives, amp switches, and instrument preamps with rock-solid construction and performance. Two of the company's more-recent offerings are the Tonebones PZ-Pre and Radial JDX amplifier-direct box.

The PZ-Pre is a single-channel preamp and direct box for acoustic instruments. It incorporates a raft of features such as a three-band tone control with mid sweep and notch filter, selectable lo-cut filter, an adjustable 12-db footswitchable boost and effects loop, dual inputs with individual level controls and pre- and post-EQ XLR outputs, as well as a tuner output with a mute footswitch. The inputs also have PZB buffer circuits that allow the user to connect a passive piezo pickup directly to either input of the PZ-Pre and boost its level to match an active system. The dual XLR outputs (one pre-EQ and one post-EQ) allow the user to send an uncolored signal to the mixer via the pre-EQ jack, while also directing a colored post-EQ signal to a stage monitor. This allows the artist to noodle with the tone settings on the box without affecting what is heard by the front-of-house engineer.

Tested with a variety of instruments fitted with active and passive pickups (including an A-style mandolin, acoustic bass, and both steel string and

nylon-string acoustics), PZ-Pre's three-band tone control and notch filter, along with the low-cut switch, gave just enough flexibility to be useful, yet was still simple and straightforward enough to dial in a sound without having to tweak too much. The voicing of the tone controls was musical, smooth and relatively quiet, without a lot of unwanted noise or phasing issues. Being able to engage the unit's PZB buffer amp to compensate for the mandolin's weak pickup signal made a noticeable improvement. These boost buttons can only be engaged by manipulating a small, recessed switch with a pen or other small, pointy object, making it nearly impossible to "accidentally" adjust.

The JDX is an active direct box; for live work, you simply run a cable from it to the PA instead of trying to mic the cabinet. So why would players want a box like this? Most gigging guitar players have run into the problems and situations associated with mic'ing guitar amps in concert, such as having too little room for a mike stand in front of their amp or getting noisy bleed-through from other instruments like drums and bass. Some players aren't even sure which speaker to mic on a multi-speaker cabinet. While DI boxes that accept a speaker-level input or amps and cabinets with "speaker emulated" XLR outputs are nothing new in the

market, the results have been mixed. Much of the time the sound tends to have a buzzy high-end, especially with higher-gain settings. They can also lack realistic low-end punch, and get lost in the mix. But the Radial JDX, with its Reactive Load circuitry, connects between amp and speaker and allows the electromagnetic impulse from the speaker(s) to mix with the sound of the amp for a more-realistic sound.

At several live gigs running through a Fender Deluxe tweed 1x12" the JDX produced a very accurate, realistic tone through a P.A., similar to the mic'ed-up sound in the studio, but more consistent and without bleed-through or unwanted stage/room resonance. The JDX also did a good job of producing the sound of a mic'ed speaker, producing a natural midrange that didn't wash out under vocals. The results in the studio were also good with a 30-watt/EL84 head and 2x12 cabinet, where the JDX's sound was fatter, with thicker low-end than a mic, and blending a mic signal with the JDX signal generated a big sound, especially when hard-panned

left and right. Even in an ideal venue with a large stage, where volume or bleed-through are not a concern, pairing the JDX with a mic is not only a good backup, but a great way to add a layer to one's guitar tone.

The Tonebone PZ-Pre and Radial JDX deliver on their promises, and do so in super-rugged boxes with well-conceived features and pro-level tone. — *Phil Feser*



RADIAL TONEBONE JDX/PZ-PRE
Price: \$199 (JDX); \$299.99 (PZ-Pre)
Contact: radialeng.com.

GEARIN' UP



MAXON DB10 DUAL BOOSTER

The Maxon DB10 Dual Booster has two independent boost circuits with their own input and output jacks, allowing them to be cascaded or split by a separate overdrive/distortion pedal. Its Clean channel has +20 dB of boost and flat frequency response, while its Vintage channel has +20 dB of boost and slight high-frequency roll-off. It's wired with mechanical true-bypass switching. Learn more at maxonfx.com.



LAFFING DOG BLUE DOG OD

Laffing Dog's Blue Dog overdrive pedal offers clean boost and multiple overdrive tones. It has controls for Volume, Tone, Gain, Drive, and a Clean knob that blends clean signal back into the overdriven signal. For more, visit laffing-dog.com.



WALLACE AMPLIFICATION K20

Wallace Amplification's K20 is a 1x12 combo that uses four EL84 power tubes and four 12AX7 preamp tubes and produces 30 watts output through an Eminence Swamp Thang speaker. Controls include Volume, Treble, Mid, and Bass, with Master Volume, Cut, and Reverb. Learn more at wallaceamps.com.



KINSMAN KUPB8

The Kinsman KUPB8 holds up to eight pedals in place using velcro and has reinforced corners on a 688 x 296 x 83mm locking hard case. Read more about it at jhs.co.uk/kinsman.html.



MUSICNOMAD NOMAD TOOL

MusicNomad's Nomad Tool cleans the strings, body, and hardware of a guitar or bass without the need for cleaning solutions. Its washable microfiber pad cleans strings, and its natural-fiber brush removes dust on the body, bridge, pickups, saddles, tuners, headstock, and more. Go to musicnomadcare.com.