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THE AVETT BROTHERS

RECORDING *THE CARPENTER* WITH RICK RUBIN & RYAN HEWITT

FROM LEFT: BOB CRAWFORD, RYAN HEWITT, SCOTT AVETT AND SETH AVETT ON A BREAK FROM THEIR LAUREL CANYON VIDEO SHOOT.

Tech // reviews

RADIAL, EMPIRICAL LABS, ELYSIA
Three 500 Series Processors for Shaping Your Sounds

Modular 500 Series processors are versatile and less expensive than buying rack gear because you're not buying the power supply every time—your rack supplies the power. Another great plus is that the category has allowed manufacturers to think outside the (rack) box, resulting in processors for live and studio use that are unique to the series. For instance, the Empirical Labs DocDerr cannot be found in traditional rack gear format. And while Radial Engineering offers other non-500 re-amping boxes, none approach the feature set of the EXTC and the company's 2-channel Radial X-Amp. Elysia is about to release the nvelope in a single-rackspace unit but it first bowed in the compact format tested here.

RADIAL ENGINEERING EXTC

Like all Radial gear I've used and tested in the past, the EXTC is well made with solid switches and pots, journeyman sonics and great features. Simply explained, it's an I/O box that allows you to use instrument-level, unbalanced gear (aka stomp boxes) in a balanced, +4 workstation environment. Features include variable wet/dry control for dialing your effects up or down in the mix, polarity flip and Omniport insert buttons. The latter is for use with Radial's Workhorse 500 Series rack, which has an extra TS connector on the back allowing for various bonus features depending on the unit. In this case, the Omniport adds an additional unbalanced insert path that is wired in series with the front panel insert. Lastly, on the EXTC's front panel are TS Send and Receive jacks, each of which has its own volume control. Being that guitar pedals are noisy neighbors, this is a great feature for getting a handle on your S/N

ratio. And speaking of noise, the EXTC's transformer-isolated output means you'll never fight the 60Hz hum beast.

I used the EXTC on various recorded guitar parts through Electro-Harmonix Black Finger and LPB 2ube pedals. The simple plug-and-go setup had me auditioning sounds right away. The Black Finger had its own I/O control, so I optimized my S/N by playing around with the Send/Receive levels vs. the pedals' gain controls. I quickly had the levels matched between the EXTC's wet/dry settings at lowest noise possible. The LPB 2ube had no in/out gain so I relied solely on the EXTC's send/receive levels to set things up. This is a great feature that comes in handy no matter what pedal you're using.

For $249 street, this is a must-have unit for any 500 Series owner. The features and construction are solid, and it gives you the ability to use low-cost guitar gear in the studio setting. Low tech is cool and just the right thing to bring new personality to your mixes, giving them a kick in the pants.

TRY THIS

When working with a guitar pedal that has its own gain control, you can use the EXTCs Send/Receive volume to keep your noise floor at an acceptable level. Start with the EXTC's Send/Receive levels at 12 o'clock and use your pedal's volume control to set the level to your track. To bring the noise level down, lower your pedal's output and raise the EXTC's Send level until you reach the same level on the track.