



LR Baggs Venue DI £339

A Guitarist Top 10 product from NAMM 2009 finally arrives. It was worth the wait... *by Dave Burrluck*

It's over a year since Guitarist's news team spotted this neat, unique product at the NAMM show in January 2009. "Finally," we thought, "someone's made a preamp 'tool-kit' for the gigging acoustic musician, not the studio or live sound recording boffin." Why the long wait – the unit only started shipping in late 2009 – we don't know but, frankly, we don't care. Our initial instincts were correct: if you gig with an acoustic guitar, you need one of these.

Typically well-designed with a small footprint, the unit runs off a single battery or non-supplied mains adaptor. Battery life isn't huge, but the battery-check LED at least lets you see what's in the tank. We'd done five two-hour gigs and two lengthy rehearsals before we changed battery just to be on the safe side.

The unit boasts a high input impedance (10 meg ohms), so even instruments without onboard preamps should happily work here, and features a five-band EQ section, with sweepable low and hi mid-range, each band with +/- 12dB cut/boost. Feedback-busting is

catered for by a single-knob Garrett Null notch filter (proprietary to LR Baggs), plus a phase switch.

Also onboard we get a switchable boost function (you can set your boost level via a small rotary control on the unit's top edge) and onboard tuner. The latter has a large ring of green LEDs around its circular display that meet and introduce a red LED when you're in tune – the note is clearly indicated by a red LED segment display.

A simple FX loop is joined by the ultra important DI output. "This output is transformer-coupled for maximum isolation from noise and ground loop hum," says LR Baggs in the comprehensive manual. "The signal level is set at 0dBu and will work into a 600-ohm or higher input impedance, so you have plenty of signal strength to send down long cables. The XLR output isn't affected by the volume control but is affected by all other controls."

In use

With all the EQs in their centre-notched (flat) positions and the notch filter switched out, it's

easy to set your input level via the gain control and clip meter. The volume controls set your output level and, with a lot of EQ boost available, just keep an eye on the input of your destination amp. To our ears everything sounds very clean and the EQs very natural. The notch filter and phase switch are very effective, especially at smaller gigs where you might be closer to your backline amp than you'd like.

The adjustable boost proved invaluable – its orange status LED always a godsend on a dark stage – and the tuner is sensitive, accurate and very easy to see. Of course, if you're playing through a big PA, it's all you need along with a lead and guitar – just point the soundman to that DI and, trust us, he or she will love you.

Verdict

Guitarist Gold Awards are rare, but here's one of the most obvious and worthy awards we've given out. We honestly can't think of anything more the gigging acoustic musician would need and everything works perfectly, sounds top drawer and it's already a part of our gigging set-up. Okay, it's not a cheap fix, but then no quality units of its type are and none of the others available include an onboard tuner.

So, for us, it's bye-bye separate pedals and patch leads and hello to improved EQ, DI and superb feedback-busting. Excellent.

The Bottom Line

We like: Everything: a fantastically practical design

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: Whether you see it as a pucker DI box with extras or a preamp with all the toys, if you're a gigging acoustic musician, just buy one – you'll thank us

The Rivals

Fishman's Platinum Pro (£199) outboard preamp also features DI output, notch filter and phase switch, four-band EQ and 'smooth' acoustic compression. **Radial's PZ-Pre** (£361) is very well spec'd with dual inputs, three-band EQ, dual-Q notch filter, a high-pass filter and a phase switch along with dual pre- and post-balanced XLR, tuner and more. **Headway's EDB-1** (£199) is a dual-channel preamp, ideal for dual-pickup sources, and has both XLR ins and outputs, five-band interactive EQ, high pass filter, notch filter and more!

LR Baggs Venue DI

PRICE: £339 (inc carry case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All-in-one full isolation DI, preamp, EQ and tuner for acoustic instruments

PROGRAMMABLE: No

CONTROLS: Bass, low mid, low mid tune, mid hi, mid hi tune, presence, treble, notch, gain (input), volume (output) rotary controls. Phase switch, battery switch

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm input, output, FX send and return. Balanced, transformer coupled XLR DI output

POWER: 9V battery (approx 40hrs) or 9VDC power supply (not included)

OTHER FEATURES: Switchable boost with adjustable gain (0-9dB); Tuner with Mute/Tune footswitch; Battery check and input LED clip meter; ground lift switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.2/1

DIMENSIONS: 194 (w) x 190 (d) x 38mm (h)

RANGE OPTIONS: Other LR Baggs preamps include the Para DI (£199.95) and the Gig Pro (£124.95) and MixPro (£224.95) belt-clip preamps

Strings and Things

01273 440442

www.lrbaggs.com

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

