

# Universal Audio 710 Twin-Finity | £599

UA's latest offering is a hybrid preamp that contains a blend-able tube/transistor signal path. *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* travels from here to Twin-Finity!



#### WHAT IS IT?

A twin channel, mic/ instrument preamp, utilising tube and solid-state signal paths with unique blend control

#### CONTACT

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#### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Can sound clean or dirty or anywhere in between using the blend control
- 2 Low noise with plenty of gain/headroom available
- **3** Will sit comfortably on a desktop, out and about, or in a rack

here's been steady flow of new
Universal Audio products
coming through Future Music
HQ lately. From the DCS

Remote Pre and 2-LA-2 to the upcoming UAD-2 card, UA's design workbench is busy to say the least!

The latest offering from UA is the Model 710 Twin-Finity mic/line/Hi-Z/DI preamp. It not only provides a tube and transistor signal path but also a blend control, allowing the user to move smoothly from 100% transistor signal to a 100% tube signal or any blend of the two in varying amounts. In theory, this pre could be the answer to many people's dreams!

Make no mistake, the 710 looks great and is well laid out. The 2U, half-rack, metal-chassis design, reminds me of my Avalon U5 preamp/DI though the 710 weighs considerably less. The 710 can either sit upon a desktop or is rackable using the included rack-

mounting kit – a nice surprise considering we normally get fleeced for essential extras such as this!

There are three main dials on the front panel that control the two

preamps' input/output and blend between the solid-state/transistor and tube signal paths. On the left is a gain control that raises the amount of gain applied to the input by a not-to-be-sniffed-at +60dBu (for the mic input), or +40dBu (using the line input or front panel Hi-Z jack input/DI). There is a 15dB pad available for high output mic's as well.

#### Ins 'n' outs

On the right is a level control that acts as a master volume, attenuating the signal sent from the rear panel line out XLR (to your DAW for example). Unfortunately, there is no mic output level XLR on the 710. In the bottom centre of the front panel is the blend dial, which is the key feature of the 710 (more on this important feature later). Moving swiftly on, taking front-panel

#### **Tube versus Solid-State**

There are two separate preamps contained within the 710 (summed into one output). The Class-A, high-voltage vacuum tube amplifier utilises a single 12AX7 tube and is based on 'vintage guitar amplifier designs' according to the manual (though most guitar amps have several tubes methinks?)

It's designed to allow precise and smooth control over the amount of even-order harmonic distortion applied to the signal path. Even-order harmonic distortion is very easy on the ears and can transform the most anaemic of sounds into something altogether more warm and sizzly!

The solid-state transistor preamp in the 710, is designed to be super-quiet, capture fast attack/transients and exhibit very low distortion characteristics in line with the preamps found in

many of UA's other devices (such as the DCS Remote Preamp).

It's what UA call a 'transimpedance design' that feeds current back into the circuit to inhibit noise and distortion and thus, this pre is largely transparent in character until the input gain is pushed. Transparent pres are particularly useful for tracking, when colour is to be added via other pres or outboard at the mix stage.







centre stage is a diamond shaped yellow-illuminated VU display that shows either the output or drive level. When set to drive, the display shows the total amount of even-order harmonic distortion occurring, which is occasionally useful, though I still find

this price point. Compared to my Avalon U5 though, the switchgear feels cheap.

Now back to that unique blend control. While there are several manufacturers offering twin signal path designs, there are few (if any) that can continuously blend two signal paths.

with a tighter low end and more sizzly/ fuzzy highs).

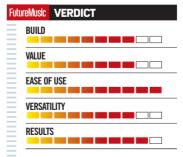
Both pres and available blends can enhance any instrument or vocal. adding sparkle, earthiness, grit or little or no character/distortion in infinite combinations! I loved the 710

> particularly on synths, Rhodes, bass guitar, acoustic guitars and vocals, where it added welcome life, body and movement. Above all, this box really

makes you experiment and it's fun hearing your sound morph as you move the blend control, though this can be very subtle at low gain levels.

The real fun is combining the gain and output settings and then combining these settings with the blend control. The only downsides for me are that it's a little too easy to overdrive the pres and it can occasionally sound a little nasty and spiky. Also it's a shame there aren't two separate outputs for each path.

This aside, UA has made a fun, intuitive, versatile and great sounding preamp. It can cover many audio bases and at just under £600 in the UK, I believe it to be sensibly priced. I challenge anyone to not find a use for a 710 in their studio! FM



It sounds good, is reasonably priced and can be clean, nasty or anywhere in between!

# Both pres and available blends can add sparkle, earthiness and grit in infinite combinations

LED meters/PPM's to be more accurate than VU's in general.

## Blending in

There is a fine compliment of switching. Phantom power is provided along with a mic/line switch, a phase invert and a 75Hz low cut. All the dials and switches feel fairly sturdy but not quite as solid as I was expecting for a UA product at

sounds to be made. You can have a totally transistor path when set to fully counter clockwise (or a totally tube path when set fully clockwise) but it's the inbetween bits that other preamps can't quite reach and it's here that you can truly dial in different flavours or colours that are pretty unique to the 710, though unfortunately there's no centre detent for the very useable half and half blend setting.

This feature enables some unique

#### Gain control

The transistor preamp can sound super-clean with low input or tough and ballsy when you start to increase the gain to around 4-5. The tube preamp is definitely warmer, more guey and less precise than its transistor counterpart but equally as characterful, albeit in a subtly different way. Again, turning the gain to around 4-5 is when you really hear the character of either of the pres start to kick in, though this may be a little too soon for some

Turning the gain fully up while the blend control is set to full tube, allows full-blown guitar amp style distortion/ harmonics with rounded full lows and smooth highs, while doing the same in the transistor mode again adds distortion but in a more transistor amp style (i.e. a little cleaner and thinner

#### Inputs

SPECS

Microphone (Female XLR), Balanced Line (Female XLR), Unbalanced Instrument (1/4" jack) (DI)

#### **Outputs**

Balanced Line (Male XLR)

#### **Preamps**

Tube & Solid-State Phase-Aligned Tone-Blending Mic Pre & DI, Tube stage utilises a single 12ax7 tube

-15dR High-Pass Filter: rolls off at 75Hz

# **Gain Range: Infinity**

to 70dBu Mic: 10 ~ 60dBu Line: 10 ~ 40dBu

**Hi-Z:** 10 ~ 40dBu

#### Frequency Response Mic: 20Hz to 100kHz

+/- 0.2dBu Line: 20Hz to 100kHz

+/- 0.2dBu

Hi-Z: 20Hz to 100kHz

+/- 0.2dBu Min THD+Noise @ +4dBU: 0.1% tube 0.005% solid-state

#### Dimensions

214 x 260 x 89mm

Weight 2.4Kg

#### **ALTERNATIVES**

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#### TL Audio Ebony A1

A new dual-channel preamp/DI with both a transistor and tube path in a 2U rack. Also has an optional digital output card, 30dB pad and DI inputs



#### Millennia TD-1 £1.280

A half rack recording channel from high end specialists Millennia Audio. Includes a Class-A FET and Tube path. DI and a mic pre, comprehensive EQ and guitar power soak built in

#### mil-media.com



# Avalon U5

High Voltage transistor preamp/instrument DI with preset EQ, low-/high-cut switches speaker input, headphone out and separate mic/line outs. Built like a tank!

#### avalondesign.com





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