Tech 21 Q\Strip

BY ED FRIEDLAND

NEW JERSEY-BASED TECH 21 HAS BEEN DEDICATED to solving the problems faced by electric-guitar and bass players since 1989. Its legendary analog SansAmp pedal pre-dated digital modeling by many years and helped open the door for the direct-recording revolution. With no shortage of problems to solve, Tech 21 keeps coming up with great products to make our lives more musical, the latest being the Q\Strip, an EQ/preamp pedal inspired by the famed solid-state recording consoles of the '60s and '70s. This little box claims to bring the power of the studio to your pedalboard, but does it?

As a dedicated EQ, the Q\Strip is not a guitar- or bass-specific product; it works great with keyboards, or as an outboard processor for a mixing board. But as a pedalboard EQ solution, the Q brings a new level of sophistication and function down to floor level. With ±20dB of gain available from the LEVEL control, you can trim or boost within a wide range. The LOW and HIGH controls are shelving EQs with ±18dB and crossover points set at 40Hz and 1kHz. The two midrange bands also provide ±18dB, with mid 1 sweeping between 40Hz–700Hz and mid 2 between 300Hz–6kHz. A high-pass filter (preset for 12dB-per-octave attenuation below 45Hz) greatly reduces low-frequency dreck that can cloud your sound or create havoc when amplifying acoustic instruments, while the lowpass filter focuses its 12dB per octave cut at 3kHz to achieve an instant old-school tone, or to better interface with distortion pedals in a direct application. Tech 21 suggests the LPF can be used for cabinet simulation, but keep in mind that the 100%-analog MOSFET-driven Q\Strip does not have the company's signature SansAmp technology, and is not an amp-emulation device. The Q\Strip has a 4.7MΩ input, which makes it extremely useful as a buffer preamp for piezo pickups—in fact, all that's needed is a phase-reversal switch to make the Q\Strip the perfect acoustic-instrument preamp. The parallel output sends an unaffected signal to your amp, but be aware that connecting a lower-impedance device to this output will drop the input's overall impedance, which may result in a reduced signal. The balanced XLR output accepts phantom power, and it has a –20dB pad to match up with different input-level requirements. The ¼" output offers +10dB of gain to help match up with different inputs, giving the Q\Strip enough muscle to drive a power amp by itself.

As a "neutral" device, the Q\Strip can be placed anywhere in your pedal chain, depending on the task you assign it. It can be used as an additional preamp/EQ before the amp input, or you can bypass your amp's preamp/EQ completely by routing the Q\Strip's ¼" out to your amp's effect return. The Q\Strip's versatility makes it a handy item to pack for the road, and I've found it useful in a variety of settings. Performing a live radio broadcast on a day when my regular rig was already set up at the evening's venue, the Q\Strip proved the perfect tool for sending my sculpted upright tone to the engineer via the DI, while the in-house bass-monitor rig benefited greatly from the more precise EQ. I've used the Q\Strip as a recording DI, connecting the XLR out to the input of my Scarlett 18i8 interface, and achieved the silky-smooth studio

tone that people spend big bucks to capture. And practicing at home through a tiny Phil Jones Bass Cub, the Q\Strip's HPF and EQ let me filter out frequencies the amp couldn't handle, giving it more headroom and clarity.

If I were designing the Q\Strip strictly for bass, I might have set the HPF for a steeper cut; –12dB per octave is helpful, but in my high-volume world, –18dB or even –24dB might be better. Some eyebrows may be raised at the HIGH control being centered at the relatively low 1kHz, but if you're looking for sparkling high end, you have up to 6kHz on the MID 2 control. Yes, it's a little counterintuitive, but the overlapping nature of the two mid bands makes the Q\Strip a little more versatile in my opinion. Bottoming out at 40Hz, the MID 1 control can be employed for low-frequency duty, while MID 2 can work with the highs. Having an area of redundancy in the middle frequencies can be useful if one of the mid bands is being used in its outer limits. Once you grasp the logic of the configuration, you'll find the Q\Strip offers enough versatility to put it firmly in the "musical Swiss Army knife" category. With its quiet operation, clean headroom, and powerful EQ, the Tech 21 Q\Strip is a great tool for tone freaks on the go. **BP**

SPECIFICATIONS

TECH 21

Q\Strip
Street $250
Pros Potent EQ on the go
Cons Wish list: phase reversal, dual channel w/mic preamp please!
Bottom Line Studio-grade EQ for your pedalboard.

SPECS

Input ¼", 4.7MΩ
Output ¼" parallel out, ¼" out w/+10dB boost, XLR out w/phantom, ground, –20dB pad
Controls LEVEL, BASS, MID 1, SHIFT 1, MID 2, SHIFT 2, HIGH, PHANTOM/GROUND CONNECT, +10DB BOOST, –20DB XLR, HPF, LPF
Power 9-volt battery, AC adapter (not included)
Dimensions 3.5" x 4.5" x 1.5"

Made in U.S.A.
Contact tech21nyc.com