



**CHROME MAGNUM:**  
The Mesa has  
knobs a plenty.

# PRE EMINENT

## Mesa Rectifier Recording Preamp

By **Emile Menasché**

**M**ESA/BOOGIE'S Randall Smith was probably the first person to realize the sonic potential of a guitar amplifier's preamp stages. He did so by adding additional gain stages to a traditional tube amp design, and in the process revolutionized tube tone.

Thirty odd years after Smith's breakthrough, Mesa continues to push the sonic boundaries. With modern trends moving toward direct recording and digital preamps, it's only fitting that Mesa would devise a studio-friendly guitar preamp of its own: the Rectifier Recording Preamp. But instead of doing a digital emulation of tubes, Mesa stuck to what it knows best: the real thing.

### Basic Features

The two-rack-space Rectifier Preamp features two independent all-tube channels, each of which has its own control set. With six 12AX7 tubes, this monster lacks neither gain nor warmth. Yet the key, according to Mesa amp guru Doug West, is in the output stage, where a series of transformers and toroidal coils have to do the job of a regular amp's power section and speakers. Fortunately, the design works: the Rectifier preamp is responsive to the touch and offers all the nuances you'd expect from an honest-to-God tube amp.

Despite its moniker as a recording device, the Rectifier Pre is flexible enough to handle both recording and live situations. In addition to a 1/4-inch guitar input, it has a host of connections that include stereo 1/4-inch TRS balanced recording outs; a parallel effects loop with a 1/4-inch mono effects send, stereo 1/4-inch effect returns and a mix control; and a stereo 1/4-inch balanced Live output designed

to work with a power amp, such as Mesa's Rectifier Stereo 2:100. It also accommodates a footswitch for channel switching on the fly.

Each channel offers three switchable modes and a fully independent set of controls, including gain, treble, mid, bass, presence and master knobs. In addition, channel 1 sports a bright switch and a -3dB pad for extra headroom. The independent master volume controls are especially useful for live performance and recording situations where you're switching channels on the fly.

Of channel 1's three modes, Clean is the brightest, with substantial low-end roll-off and plenty of top-end detail. The Fat mode is based on the Mesa/Boogie Mark I and boosts the lows to add a solid foundation without sacrificing the Clean mode's shimmering highs. The Brit mode is more nasal in the midrange, and sounds slightly crunchier and more compressed. It's important to note that all three of channel 1's

modes can run the gamut from clean to over-driven sounds. The tone controls work with the gain to play an important role in defining the sound.

Channel 2's three modes are equally diverse. The Raw mode, ironically, is one of the Recto's warmest modes. Push it for fat lead

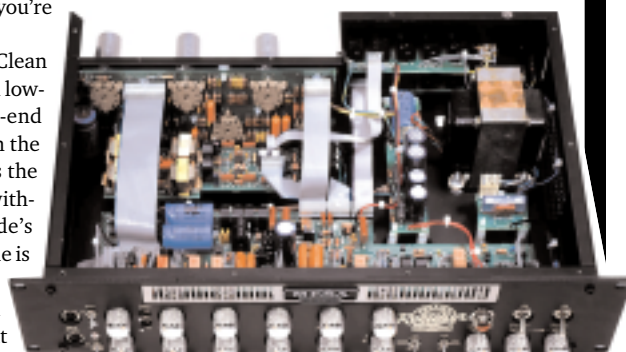
work, crunchy rhythm or bluesy soloing. Ease off the gain and you have a dark but clean rhythm sound. Vintage mode is a monster—wide, detailed and dripping with gain. You can sculpt just about any lead or rhythm sound you want here, including some that go beyond the limitations of a traditional amp/cabinet/microphone setup. The Modern mode, based on channel 2 of the original Recto, is brighter and nastier than Vintage, and could cut through

just about any mix. Ride the midrange control and go from paper-thin crunch to superfat industrial fuzz.

For even more variety, the output voicing can be switched between a warm recording sound or a brighter live sound; I tracked some very feisty dirty rhythm sounds with the switch

**THE TUBEY BROTHERS:**  
Six 12AX7s share space in  
the Mesa.

in the Live position. There are three output level controls:



one sets the recording output, while the other two let you switch between two volume settings live. Very cool.

### The Bottom Line

The Rectifier Recording Preamp is unlike any direct recording device I've ever tested. It sounds and behaves like not one tube amp but six *different* amps, each of which has its own soul. If you're the type of person who likes to turn on a preamp, get a preset and play, the Rectifier might be a bit of a challenge, since you'll typically need to adjust the controls to get an ideal tone when switching to a different mode or guitar. But taking that time let me hear the guitar with fresh ears. More important, the Recto *pre felt* like a real amp, and that feeling came out in the music. This is no processor—it's an instrument. ■

### KA-CHING!

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