Meris 440, Mercury 7 500 Series Review

By Rob Tavaglione

HERE'S THE LINK TO THE REVIEW

Meris' 440 mic preamp and Mercury7 reverb for 500 Series chassis, respectively.

Perhaps I'm a little late to the party, as Meris has seemingly come out of nowhere (well, from LA, to be specific) to grab many engineers' attentions. In our collective state of elevated expectations, it's hard for new companies to garner interest and respect, but Meris has done just that with a novel formula: a boutique approach, unusual niche products and affordable prices that compete with mass-marketed major manufacturers. Here, I examine two Meris products: the 440 preamplifier and Mercury7 reverb for 500 Series formats, $549 each (direct).

MERIS 500 SERIES 440 MIC PREAMPLIFIER

At first glance, the 440 appears to be straightforward, with typical features like 60 dB of gain, a one mega-ohm impedance quarter-inch DI, 48 V phantom power and a -12 dB/octave high pass filter. Closer inspection reveals some very useful advanced features, too—80 Hz or 200 Hz HPF frequency cutoffs, an output trim ranging from -27 to +12 dB, a defeatable high shelving boost (+3 dB) at 4 kHz or 7 kHz and Cinemag transformers at input as well as output. With a quarter-inch input effects loop for re-amping, a self-noise of only -130 dB (EIN, A-weighted) and American build quality, the 440 has certainly earned my full interest at the gate.

Meris calls the 440 "the ultimate guitar preamp." While that may very well be true, it is hardly a one-trick pony. The 440 worked well on all sources I tested; it's just that its features are perfect for guitar capturing. Do you have too much rumble, too much proximity effect? Engage the 80 Hz HPF. Mired in mud and cloudiness? Jack that HPF to 200 Hz. Dead strings and no top-end? Kick in the 4 kHz boost. Craving some (passive) ribbon smoothness without any cellulite? Try the 80 Hz HPF and the 7 kHz shelf boost. All that tonal shaping negates the need for selectable impedance or lots of mix processing. But what if you'd like to optimally add unbalanced effects, post-guitar amp? Patch that

quarter inch effects loop into your favorite chain of stomp pedals and effect the 440's output for a sound that is a little more defined than front-end effects insertion (e.g., slap back and repeating echoes).

Lo-fi enthusiasts and knob-twisters will revel in the 440's non-guitar creative apps. Vocals through guitar effects, drum room mics through compressor pedals and subgroups through inappropriate mangling devices are just a few of its ultra-creative uses. Crunchers, don't forget the 440's output level control, as you can dial in a little too much gain at the input transformer and then selectively overdrive the output as well.

The Meris 440 is a good buy for a nice and clean transformer coupled preamp. Throw in its effects loop and you have an intriguingly artsy device for only a small cash outlay. Throw in those filters and shelves and you have a mic amp so versatile that it is undeniable—immediate purchase recommended!

MERIS 500 SERIES MERCURY 7 REVERB

Meanwhile, the word is already out on Meris' Mercury 7; it's a very desirable reverb. Sure, it's mono only (although multiple units can be strapped for stereo or surround apps) and its many controls are squeezed into this barely-large enough form factor, but my complaints stop there.

One big knob (Space Decay) controls reverb decay time of the two algorithms offered, Ultraplate and Cathedral. Numerous parameters are offered, including high and low shelving EQ, a wet/dry mix control (allowing in-line or aux bus processing), a Swell button, a Modulation control and numerous modulation types (pitch up or down, octave, a fifth up or Shimmer).

Don't think for a moment that this little box is non-versatile with only two algorithms or lacking in features due to space constraints. Let me introduce you to its alternate functions, all accessible by holding down Algorithm selections. Alt-Space Decay controls pre-delay; Alt-Modulate controls modulation speed; Alt- Lo Freq controls reverb density; Alt-Mix controls pitch vector mix (blending reverb tank pitch-shifted signal and standard reflections); Alt-Pitch Vector varies the swell functions attack time; and Alt-Hi Freq yields vibrato depth for modulating long wispy tails.

The result of all this feature-cramming is indeed a complicated little 'verb, but then again, most good reverbs are a bit intricate in order to be flexible enough for widespread use. There is a ridiculous amount of artistic variety available here, and more than I dare try to exhibit. I have put together a webclip of the Mercury7 simply wetting up some rock drum tracks, in a few pedestrian modes (just straight-up verb, no modulations, EQ or pitch shifting) at various tempos. Listen here https://soundcloud.com/pro-audio-reviewmagazine.

If you're used to in-the-box 'verbing and looking for a little creative mojo, the Mercury7 may just be your spark. Fear not, you'll only need a mono send and a mono return on your interface to route some reallife, knob-tweakable, unpredictable fun into your productions. Just remember to use a small buffer and/or nudge your reverb prints forward to compensate for latency, chart your settings or just twist, tweak, swell and tap your way into psychedelic bliss— just like a good reggae dub mixer would!