

Schertler: Swiss for “Can You Hear Me Now?”

By Steven Stone

Acoustic musicians have long had to deal with a basic dilemma since the first stringed-instrument player stared across the cave at a bunch of drums – the need to be louder. Electronic amplification is an obvious solution, but it comes with a cost – no longer sounding acoustic.

The Schertler company’s primary mission has always been to make amplified acoustic instruments sound like themselves, only louder. Schertler’s products span the entire signal chain, from pickups to combo amplifiers. I’ve reviewed the Schertler Unico amplifier, Bluestick guitar pickup, and their DYN acoustic instrument pickup. Since I’m a big fan of any amplifier that’s light and small, when I heard about Schertler’s new David amp, it struck me as worth exploring.

The David acoustic amplifier could be dubbed the “son of Unico.” Scaled down to a compact 12" x 10" x 13" package from the Unico’s 16" x 13" x 10½" cabinet size, the David uses an 80-watt bi-amped system with two power amps to deliver 50 watts RMS to a 6" woofer and 30 watts RMS to a 1" dome tweeter. The Unico has a similar arrangement except it uses a 150-watt RMS power amplifier to drive its 8" midrange/woofer. The amplifiers employ bi-polar output devices rather than MOSFETs or a class D design. The amplifiers also use toroidal transformers in the power supply and a class A input circuit.

By combining a microphone and DYN channel as well as Stat and Line-level channel, the David actually supports more potential kinds of inputs than the Unico, but with a maximum of two at a time (the Unico permits three, making it better for more input-intensive applications). Both amplifiers share a similar Master section which has a master Volume, master Reverb, Aux Volume, DI out, insert, line, and aux outs, and Low-Cut switch.

Each input channel has its own adjustable analog plate reverb in addition to the adjustable plate reverb on the master. Reverb can be added to each channel individually or as a universal setting on the master. This makes it easy to give the vocals a bit more “romance” by increasing the reverb on that channel while keeping the guitar input channel “dry” with no reverb. Then you can add a touch of overall reverb via the master’s reverb level controls for a bit of extra sparkle. Both inputs also sport three channels of EQ – Low, Mid, and High, with an adjustment range of plus or minus 15 dB.

Other useful features on the David include a line output with its own volume

adjustment, a fixed-level DI out, and a send/receive input and output so effect devices can be inserted in the signal chain.

Unlike some acoustic amps that feature extensive digital signal processing (DSP) features, the David has only a genuine analog plate reverb and three bands of analog EQ. Given how fast technology progresses in the world of digital effects and digital signal processing, using the effects loop insertion point in the David for an outboard device is a far more flexible solution for effects. An internal chip, no matter how good, can’t match the capabilities of a specialized external effects device.

Performer’s Friend

An ideal use for a David is as a sound reinforcement amplifier for a solo guitarist and singer. One channel takes a microphone while the other gets the instrument pickup. Unlike many acoustic amplifiers, the David’s built-in phantom power means it can even accept a condenser microphone on its Mic channel. If you have to take public transportation to a gig, all you need carry is the David, your instrument, a microphone, mic stand, and a couple of cables. Get yourself a small folding roller cart and you’re set to transverse any urban environment.

Since it only has two inputs, which have different gain and impedance capabilities, you can’t expect that every combination of two sources will work without some fiddling. For instance, if you use a Schertler DYN pickup, it needs to be plugged into the Mic/DYN channel. And if a DYN pickup is plugged into that channel you won’t have anywhere to plug in a condenser microphone. To use a condenser microphone, you’ll have to employ a separate outboard microphone preamp and feed its line-level output

to the David Line/Stat input channel. Another solution would be to connect the condenser mic to the Mic/DYN channel. Then the signal from the DYN pickup would go to an outboard DI/PRE-AMP unit and that line level signal would go to the David Line/Stat channel.

Fortunately, you can use a dynamic microphone in either of David’s Line/Stat or Mic/DYN channels. But you will need to have an adapter to go from a standard XLR to a ¼" phone jack for the Line/Stat channel. Like I said, with some fiddling, almost any two sources can go into a David.

If you play in a small ensemble, the David would work nicely as an individual amp/monitor and DI. It can serve as your stage monitor/

reinforcement and send a signal to the main board for the house mix. The Aux Out also can serve a number of useful functions in a group setting, including supplying a signal for a headphone or in-ear monitor, connecting to a second amplifier, or supplying a second line level signal for stage monitors or a recording console.

The only ergonomic quirk I couldn’t find a logical explanation or work-around for was the upside-down markings on all the controls. Upside-down? Yep. To view the control’s legend you must look at the amplifier from the front. While this is fine if you have the amp behind you at the back of the stage, if it’s in front or beside you, this ain’t so good.

The Sound of David

Sonically, the David delivers clean, clear, natural sound as long as you don’t push it too hard. Overdriven, it will quickly get muddy. Although marketed primarily as an acoustic multi-input sound reinforcement amplifier, it works exceptionally well with electric guitars if you want a clean jazz sound. The David sounds much like a more open, neutral and less-colored Polytone, capable of rich harmonics but with better top-end extension and clarity.

The three bands of EQ allow for a wide range of harmonic adjustments. With my Eastwood electric eight-string mandolin I had to turn up the Mid and High controls to add sparkle to this fairly dark-sounding instrument.

Fortunately, the David had enough

The Schertler David



tonal flexibility even in this extreme case. My Takamine with a John Pearse Trinity pickup system needed almost no harmonic adjustments – none of the controls were more than -1 dB from flat.

Reverb is a tricky effect to get right. David's analog plate reverb is one of the most natural and easily adjustable effects I've used. It took no more than a couple seconds to dial in the right amount, and once set it rarely needed adjust. Sure, it would be nice to have some of the Alesis-designed DSP room settings found in the UltraSound S-50 amp, but the David's plate reverb sounds so natural it's easy to get by with it alone.

Unlike all too many amplifiers, the David is hum-free. Of course, if your guitar's pickups hum, the David will faithfully reproduce that hum in all its 60- or 120-cycle glory, but as far as self-noise and base-level hum it's quiet enough to be used in a recording studio without extensive gating.

Although the dispersion from David's two drivers is far better than a single



“wide-range” driver, if you want to hear all the amplifier's treble, even from a seated position, you'll have to tilt the amp upward slightly. Built-in tilt struts would have been a nice feature.

Is David Really a Goliath?

The David could be all the amp you need to do small club gigs. Couple its

remarkable fidelity with its compact size, and you have a combination that's hard to beat. If you feel like you need a bit more power or an extra channel for inputs, David's larger sibling, the Unico would fill the bill nicely.

Mated with Schertler's own DYN acoustic mandolin (or guitar) pickup, the David delivers a transparent window

of the pickup's sound that few, if any, acoustic amplifiers can match.

Steven Stone is a contributing editor to *Stereophile's Guide to Home Theater*. He has also written for *Stereophile*, *The Absolute Sound*, *Creem*, and *Spin* magazines. For relaxation, he plays and collects guitars and mandolins. His e-mail address is ssstone8807@aol.com. **VG**