HAMMOND
Leslie Studio 12

BY TONY ORANT

WHEN YOU HEAR THE SOUND OF THE HAMMOND ORGAN, YOU'RE ALMOST always hearing the sound of the rotating Leslie speaker as well. That lush chorale that washes over you at slow speed, the complex vibrato-meets-tremolo at fast speed, the transition between those extremes . . . it's a very expressive tool in the right hands. There's no question that simulators—both built-in and outboard—have gotten excellent in recent years. But when I stumble on a band using a real Leslie I inevitably think, "That sounds so awesome!" So, what do you do when you want that real moving air, but can't deal with the issues a full-size Leslie 122 or 147 might present? You do the Leslie Studio 12.

Features

The Leslie Studio 12 features dual rotors, a built-in preamp stage, and 1/4" inputs. It also has some features you won't find on other Leslies. First, the motors are almost maintenance free—no more oiling. Second, the Studio 12 has two channels: clean and overdrive, selectable via an optional footswitch or on the rear panel. Third, in brake mode, the treble and bass rotors always stop with their open areas in the front. This means you can mike the rotors from the front and be assured of consistent sound. Fourth, using the optional V20-RT pedal, you can continuously vary the Leslie speed between fast and slow extremes.

In Use

I took the Studio 12 to a couple of gigs during the review process. The first gig was as a special guest on another band's festival appearance. They happened to be doing a tribute set of Pink Floyd's album *Animals*, and their regular keyboardist was splitting duties between Hammond organ and electric guitar. I was hired to add all the other sounds, plus play organ when he couldn't. I could've used his B-3, but decided it would be a fantastic test to run my Hammond SK1-73 through the Leslie Studio 12, and thus compare the two rigs. I used the included two-button footswitch for rotor speed. As these songs don't use much grind, I stayed on the clean channel. This was a crowded festival stage, and the only place to put the Studio 12 was right between the B-3's Leslie 147 and the other keyboardist's Fender guitar amp.

I miked it from the front, and it sounded fantastic. Though I'd played with the three-band EQ knobs, I defaulted back to their noon position. There was no problem matching the onstage volume of the band (though I did have the thing turned up a bit) and the front-of-house engineer told me he was very surprised at how little EQ he needed to apply to put the Studio 12 in the same space as the 147. I needed no additional Leslie in my monitor to hear myself onstage, even against two electric guitars, bass, drums, and an acoustic guitar. The engineer also noted that the motors made no noise, which made his job easier.

Snap Judgment

PROS Real dual-rotor, dual-speed Leslie. Sounds fantastic. Solves many problems traditional Leslies face. Holds its own in loud, guitar-heavy bands. Continuously variable speed via optional pedal.

CONS Though 1/4" inputs provide the most flexibility, some organists might miss a dedicated multi-pin Leslie cable input (though Hammond sells various adapters).

The next night, I brought the Studio 12 to my '80s band gig, which was also outdoors. The instrument lineup is the same, but both guitarists use Marshall half-stacks, so the volume stakes were a bit higher. I still stayed on the clean channel, opting to dial in a little hair on my SK1 (since I didn't have the optional channel switch). Both guitarists' eyes lit up when I hit that first chord. They dug it every bit as much as I did, and were drilling me for information afterwards. When they found out this actually works for electric guitar as well (with no additional preamping or amp stage needed), their interest intensified. Everyone loves Stevie Ray Vaughan's Leslified guitar on "Couldn't Stand the Weather," but when I pointed out that the Leslie was a key component of Peter Frampton's sound, both guitarists had a "Eureka" moment. I'll probably be seeing another Studio 12, or its guitar-oriented counterpart the G37, onstage soon.

In using real Leslies almost my entire gigging career, what usually would happen is, I'd find a happy medium between clean and dirty to start with, and as the night wore on and the tubes got hotter, the Leslie would get more overdriven—and quieter. That's not the case here. The Studio 12 can stay loud almost all night long thanks to the tube preamp but solid-state power section. More importantly, one button push, and you have your grind. Another, and your sound cleans right back up.

The Studio 12 is highly portable and car-friendly. Standing upright (as the manual recommends for transport), it fit in my Toyota Highlander along with three keyboards, an eight-space rack, two powered monitors, two cable bags, two pedalboard cases, two keyboard stands, and a hand truck. One of my old "short boy" Leslies would have eaten up most of the cargo area by itself. The handles are well placed for transport, and though the weight is a non-trivial 85 pounds (on par with many bass combo amps), I had no problem lifting it into my car. Finally, the coated exterior (not Tolex) is super durable and makes cleaning a breeze.

Conclusions

Sonically, the Leslie Studio 12 is an attention getter, and while I won't argue that using a simulation is easier, I'd be lying if I didn't admit that from the first note, I had a grin on my face as the moving air propelled me to dig in. I don't play bass pedals, so I can't testify that the low rotor's 12" woofer will be the best choice for a organ trio that has no bassist, but for the typical gigging keyboardist, this Leslie is as practical as it is inspirational. Beware: You'll be sorely tempted to leave your simulator at home for late-night practice sessions, and keep the Studio 12 in the gig rig! ♫

On the rear panel, you'll find high- and low-impedance 1/4" inputs, gain controls for the clean and overdrive channels, three-band EQ, and knobs that fine-tune the minimum and maximum speeds for both rotors together.

Bottom Line

Bar none, this is best sounding mini-Leslie we've ever tested.

$1,795 list | $1,495 street
hammondorganco.com

Classifieds

Categories

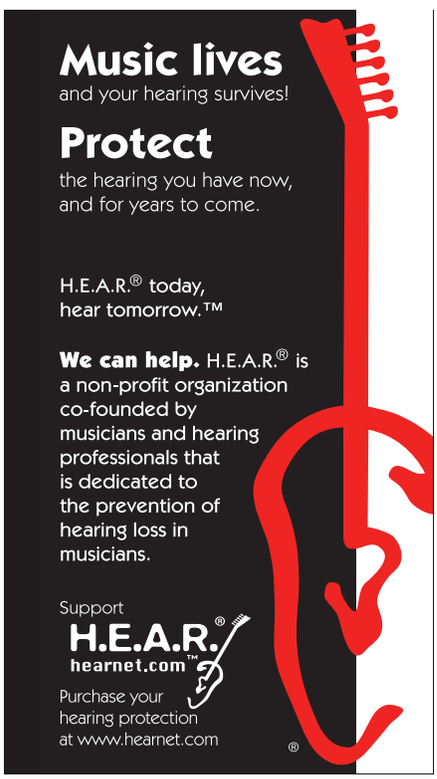
Education & Tutorial

Acoustic Products & Services

Buying or selling instruments through our Classified Ads offers you convenience, a big marketplace, and a wide range of instruments and prices. However, buying mail-order does have its drawbacks, too. Keyboard Magazine suggests the following guidelines to help the buyer and the seller in these transactions: 1) Get a written description of the instrument, which should include the serial number. 2) Get front and back photos of the instrument. 3) Get a written purchase agreement, with a 24-hour approval clause allowing the buyer to return the instrument for a full refund if it does not meet reasonable expectations.

www.keyboardmag.com

Education & Tutorial



Acoustic Products & Services

TO ADVERTISE, CONTACT:

Specialty Sales Advertising, West
Michelle Eigen
meigen@nbmedia.com,
(650) 238-0325

Specialty Sales Advertising, East
Jon Brudner
jbrudner@nbmedia.com,
(917) 281-4721