

HAMMOND®

Hands-On Review

SK1 and LS2215

By Christopher Dean Elliot, *Musician's Friend* Copywriter

Once a month I throw a party at my house and invite my musician friends (many of them from *Musician's Friend*) to get together and play. One notable guest of honor this past time around was the new Leslie LS2215 keyboard amplifier, supplied on loan for the weekend. I am a trumpet player with nominal keyboard abilities, so I invited the best keyboard players I know, Mo Beeks and Gary Swan.

Mo is having a great year, his group Blind Dog Smokin' having been nominated for a Grammy in the Best Blues Album category for their release, *Decisions*, featuring Dr. John. Gary Swan's resume includes The Pointer Sisters, Mary Wells, and a recent string of dates with Rita Coolidge.

Built Leslie Tough

The first thing that strikes you with the LS2215 is its build quality. Leslie's tradition is one of solid construction and top-quality components, and that is carried through on the LS2215. The large rotary knobs turn smoothly and with satisfying resistance, the input connectors are solid, and the cabinet itself is ruggedly built, available with a black Tolex or tweed finish. Its dimensions are 21-5/8" x 13" x 29-3/16", which fits through almost any late model vehicle's trunk opening. At 70 lb., it is manageable for solo transport and an easy two-person carry.

The LS2215 is a four-input amplifier with three distinct input functions. The first two inputs are stereo, each equipped with a stereo effects loop. These additionally feature a three-band rotary EQ. The third input is monaural and features an XLR input along with an effects loop and three-band rotary EQ. This permits the singing keyboard player to execute a performance using this one amp alone. The fourth input is stereo with a volume control and no EQ, designed for pre-recorded accompaniment from an MP3 player or other such device.

The front panel also has a headphone output with volume

control. A master section provides another three-band rotary EQ as well as a master volume. On the rear, the LS2215 offers a stereo DI with the option of either XLR or

unbalanced 1/4" outputs. It additionally has a master stereo effects loop and is ported front and rear.

All of the Chill, None of the ShriII

It has long been my philosophy that stage keyboard amplification for the work-a-day musician has never quite been figured out. A lot of amps sound great when you try them out in a store, but then seem to lose their presence when paired with live drums and a confident guitarist. With piano patches, traditional keyboard amps equipped with compression drivers can have a harsh and brittle top end, and that tends to hold true when using powered PA speakers as a keyboard rig. Keyboard amps with piezo tweeters get buried even at lower volumes and quickly turn muddy and dull.



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The Leslie LS2215 is a 200-watt block of mono power with a 15" low frequency driver and a pair of 4" mid/high drivers, and perhaps that is the key to its warm, engaging, buttery and astonishing presence. The top end is gripping and robust with no shrillness at all. For keyboards, we had a Hammond SK1-73 and a Roland RD-700NX, and the organ chirps and right-hand rock piano were rich and full, but without the artificial brightness that can mar the charm of an organ patch or acoustic piano sample. As the bands played through the evening, even when the rock band showed up and started pushing it on the T. Rex and Deep Purple covers, the LS2215 remained a distortion-free and undeniable presence in the stage mix.

The stereo output of your keyboard instruments is preserved through the DI, so if you want stereo effects to be communicated to your audience, two channels on your mixer panned at 9:00 and 3:00 achieves this beautifully. We patched the DI into the PA for our little party and found that we only needed a splash of it in the mains, as the stage volume of the LS2215 ably covered the 1,000 or so square feet we were trying to address.

An Unabashed Endorsement

At the risk of being conspicuously smitten, the Leslie LS2215 is the best-sounding general-purpose keyboard amp I have ever seen in action. If you're using a powered speaker, sell it and get this instead. There are lighter keyboard amps that will get the job done, and there are amps with more features, but for your own aesthetic experience, for your own love of great sound, consider the Leslie LS2215. It has achieved a design victory in success through simplicity, impeccable component quality, and a company culture of dedication to great keyboard sound. I am buying one and so is Gary. Mo's seriously thinking about it.



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SK1 Keyboard/Organ and LS2215 Rotary Speakers

SK1 Stage Keyboard/Organ	H81471	\$1895 ⁰⁰
LS2215 Tweed Amplifier	J27129	\$699 ⁹⁹
LS2215 Black Amplifier	J27128	\$649 ⁹⁹