

Tracking and mixing Lucette's New Album: *Deluxe Hotel Room*

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REVIEW

REVIEW BY PAUL VUNK JR.

LaChapell Audio has been crafting high quality tube preamps and audio devices for over a decade. In 2009 they released the very first tube-based microphone preamp for the API 500 Series enclosure format; author Justin Peacock reviewed the double-space 583S in our April issue of that year, and in March 2018 we looked at the new single-space 583S MK2.

LaChapell Audio is no stranger to traditional 19" rack mount units, and their 3U tall 992EG dual microphone preamp, stuffed with eight tubes and Jensen transformers, is considered a boutique classic.

The latest mic preamp in the LaChapell line is the 983M, a 1U high, 1/2 rack device that can live on your desktop or be racked with optional rack ears. The M in 983M stands for 'mono' or single channel. LaChapell does offer a dual-channel model: the new 983S MK2 Dual Channel Tube Preamp.

As you can surmise from the 'MK2' designation, there was a previous 983. The MK2 line represents a marriage of technology and features found on both the original 983S and the 500 Series 583S MK2. The layout and features on the dual-channel model are exactly the same as those described below on the 983M, just doubled.

LaChapell Audio Model 983M Vacuum Tube Preamplifier

A broad-throw, versatile, tank-tough tube tracking solution for your desktop



The 983M

The 983M measures 7 3/4" across, 8" deep and 1 3/4" high. Spread right to left across its brick red and black textured faceplate are a pair of large semi-stepped control knobs for input/tube drive and output. Next to that is a four-stage LED signal/clip meter. This is followed by a self-switching 1/4" instrument level input. Next up are six robust toggle-style function switches. The first three reflect the original 983S. Where that unit offered cool-looking backlit crystal-like plastic toggle switches, here functionality is indicated by recessed LEDs located above each control.

Mute and Filters

The first switch is a channel mute switch useful for muting the unit when switching mics or cutting the audio signal between takes. Next up are a pair of 3-position filter switches. Lowpass offers a choice of 5kHz or 10khz roll-off to smooth and

tame your high end. The highpass filter offers 50Hz and 150Hz settings for maximizing headroom and removing rumble and low frequency buildup.

Polarity, Phantom Power and a Pad

The next three controls are standard preamp fare and can be found on all previous models: polarity (phase reverse) +48v phantom power, and a -20dB Pad.

Connections

On the flipside of the unit are a set of XLR I/O connectors and a 4-pin power socket which connects to the unit's external line lump power supply.

12AX7, Iron and Line Drive

The 983M is built around a Russian 12AX7 EH tube, a Cinemag CMMI input transformer, Burr-Brown and THAT Corporation balanced line drivers, and a Jensen JT-11 Output transformer.

Internal Gain (microphone)	72.5dB
Internal Gain (Hi-Z)	53.8dB
Max Output Gain	+27.8dBu (1% THD+N, 22Hz - 20kHz)
Frequency Response	9Hz - 40kHz
THD+N	Variable: 0.01% - 18%
	(per tube drive (input) gain control with -40dBu input at 1Khz)
Noise (EIN)	-124dB S/N Ratio 92dB (30dB of gain, 22Hz - 20kHz)
Input Impedance (Mic)	1.5 KOhm
Input Impedance (Hi-Z)	100K Ohm
Output Impedance	.8 Ohm

TRUE48™

TRUE48 is a LaChapell innovation. It's a dynamic phantom power supply that self regulates and adjusts to make sure that there are no sags and that your microphone gets a constant 44-48v of phantom power at all times. According to the company, this yields "more headroom, lower distortion and quicker transient recovery."

In use

I no longer have the 500 Series version on hand to do a side-by-side comparison, but in comparing similar tracks recorded with each, everything I appreciate about

the 583S MK2 holds true with the 983M. Fidelity and versatility are the words of the day with this preamp. By varying your input, tube drive and pad settings you can go from super loud, clear, clean signals to rich, gentle tube saturation, to circuit-driven harmonic overdrive with ease. In my previous review of the 583S MK2, I mentioned that it had more of a forward, vintage German Telefunken-style tube console tone, rather than the slightly thicker American Bill Putnam 610-style sound, and that holds true here again as well.

What I like best about the LaChapell sonic signature is that you can hit the

tube drive quite liberally, just shy of obvious distortion, and it adds fantastic texture, sheen and weight to your source.

The filters offer either a slight roll off, or fuller and deeper cuts on both ends of the spectrum to shape your sound, controlling both rumble and bite.

With 72db of gain, no mic is an issue here, from low-powered ribbons to low-output dynamics such as the Shure SM7B. Like its siblings, this unit makes a fantastic instrument DI, especially since the lowpass and highpass filters are available for shaping your instrument in the DI signal path; the pad is the only feature unavailable in direct instrument mode.

Wrap-up

LaChapell Audio continues to impress, with a great high-fidelity tube sound that can also be roughed up on demand for your microphones and direct instruments. 

Price: \$1199

More from: LaChapell Audio,
www.lchapellaudio.com

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