

Crane Song INSIGNA Tube EQ for 500 Series

BY WES MAEBE FOR *AUDIO MEDIA INTERNATIONAL*

We are constantly inundated with new 500 Series units. Many manufacturers have jumped on the bandwagon; it seems to be a pretty sure-fire way of selling boxes. But when a top designer like Crane Song's Dave Hill decides to release a 500 Series valve EQ, we engineers get excited.

The INSIGNA (\$1,299 street) is based around a dual-triode circuit with a 12AX7 valve. It features two shelving EQs, a parametric mid-band EQ (gyrator) and a low- and high-pass filter set. The filters are both 24 dB/octave with seven frequencies each. The high- and low-frequency shelving bands and the mid-frequency peak band all feature eight frequencies. All three bands employ buffered RC circuitry in the negative feedback path around the valve amps. The output stage sports a shielded Lundahl high-level line output transformer to combat any potential noise.

All of the INSIGNA's stepped frequency controls are high-quality Grayhill 56 Series rotary switches. The unit also features continuous Bourns pots for gain and a front panel hard bypass switch.

The INSIGNA's frequency set is rather extensive. High-pass filters range from 25 Hz to 150 Hz at seven frequencies; the low-pass filters range from 6 kHz to 20 kHz at seven

frequencies. Its filters are powerful enough to clean up low rumble, low end on LF-centric instruments as well as control harshness at the top—like guitars, for example. The HF shelf gently ranges from 3.2 kHz to 20 kHz at seven frequencies with the addition of an ultra-high AIR band.

On the other side of the spectrum, the LF band shelves from an extremely low 10 Hz to 200 Hz. Straddling the middle, the Mid peaking band deals with anything from 150 Hz to 7.2 kHz and is centered on a proportional Q (bandwidth). All three bands allow +/-12 dB boost and cut.

Following last year's AES Convention in Los Angeles, I brought one of the first units back home and have been using it on a wide variety of material ever since. I started using it in a mix for two songs from Italian rock star Gloria Nuti. The multitracks would arrive—recorded in various studios across Italy—and I'd generally sling the INSIGNA across the vocals to introduce analog warmth and valve bite. It became quickly clear that this EQ can be pushed quite aggressively without it ever sounding harsh.

For review purposes, I then decided to do something I generally don't do: track with the EQ in the chain. It turns out that this beast is an extremely useful tool when you're recording in less than optimal environments. I've recently started producing an EP for Country singer Georgia

Nevada. While still in preproduction, we got into the swing of things but didn't have time to go into a recording studio. I quickly slung up a couple of mics in my mix room to lay down the acoustic and electric guitars, lead vocals and BGVs. The INSIGNA instantly became part of the recording path, cleaning up the top end and low mush with its filters. It created different colors for layered parts as I used its three frequency bands. Since that session, it's been a permanent fixture in my Lunchbox.

Later, I was working on a very cool project rescued from a reel of 2-inch, recorded in New York in 1980. There were a few parts that we can't replace as the performers have passed away, but we felt that the rhythm

track could've been a stronger performance. We lined up musicians and recorded them live, with a couple of mics, in a high-ceiling room. In addition to some creative mic placement,

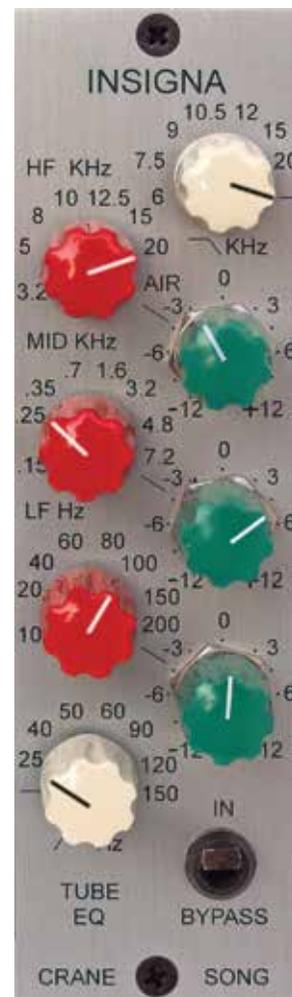
The INSIGNA is a tube EQ for the 500 Series format featuring rich second harmonic triode tube colorization.

I needed a bit of EQ to shape the sound we were going after and the INSIGNA did just that. It worked well on kick and when it came to mixing, it proved to be the perfect EQ for some extra snap and bottom-end punch out of the snare.

Clearly the INSIGNA sits in the higher price bracket of 500 series EQs and is worth every penny. It is extremely well built, as we've come to expect from Crane Song. This EQ will give you serious corrective power, character and clarity, and it just sounds so fat and musical. It's one of those modern EQs that harkens back to the good old days, where you can go a

little mad, push it to the limit and pull some very exciting sounds out of valve circuitry.

Crane Song
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