You do have the option of using *SPOS*-specific drivers along with an application that allows even more complex programming (longer keycode sequences, software macros, etc.), but the special drivers and programming application are only Windows compatible. Moreover, a Windows machine is required even to do basic in-the-keyboard programming. No biggie for me, because I can program the keyboard on my PC and then move it to my Mac, no problem. (Also, there are Java components available for use of the keyboard on Linux.)

The *SPOS* is intended for *Point Of Sale* use (*i.e.*, retail station). It even includes a credit-card reader. Hey, you can charge your clients with it!) I bought mine from Provantage.com. There are a number of different models in the line, so check out Cherry's website for details.

($134 street; www.cherrycorp.com) –AH

Sage Electronics
SE-Pre1 mic preamp

Phillip Victor Bova, along with his wife Janet Kirby and their son, Philip Shaw Bova, have a recording studio called Bova Sound in Ottawa, Canada, and their company Sage Electronics makes wonderful audio products, sold directly. Already familiar with them through the purchase of my indispensable SE-BB1 Bova Ball microphone, I was eager to check out the Sage *SE-Pre1* mic preamp.

The Sage folks are some of the nicest people that I've encountered in the audio industry. Their communication is most amiable; after I bought my microphone, Mr. Bova himself called to discuss it, and I still have the picture they sent of it, recently completed, posing on a porch in the snow. It feels good to be able to support folks who conduct their businesses in a way similar to ours.

The *SE-Pre1* uses all-discrete, solid-state, Class A circuitry, hand-wired, assembled, tested, and signed by Phillip Bova, Sr. Construction is top-notch throughout, and the unit has a three-year warranty. On the rear are three gold-plated connectors: two XLRs and the power supply connector.

The front panel sports a large chicken-head knob on a Vishay gain pot—silky feeling and smooth in its taper. There is a large switch, and a bright amber bezel light for phantom power. The face plate is purple heart wood, and in addition to being beautiful and comment-provoking, it provides a welcome break from the usual Darth Vader school of industrial design.

I used the preamp in a variety of situations, and it shone in all. The *SE-Pre1* has no pad, and doesn't seem to need it, as it is able to handle a wide range of levels. It had enough gain for an RCA 77 DX microphone and is quiet enough to use in high gain situations. It passed the brutal "jingling keys through a condenser mic test" with ease.

How does it sound? Great! It is always hard to describe sonic character verbally; if we were to draw a line between the marvelously accurate and open Millennia preamplifiers and the robust and forward sounding preamps on our API, sonically the *SE-Pre1* would be about in the middle. Very sweet and true sounding on acoustic guitar and vocal; and clear and strong on drums, electric bass, and guitar. High-fidelity, but not colorless, with an extended range and tons of headroom.

This very well-built amplifier is housed in a rugged aluminum enclosure, and there's a power supply in the same sized box. Two power supplies are available. The SE-PS 2 ($299 CDN) will power one or two modules and the SE-PS 8 ($499 CDN) up to eight. The company will provide guidelines for building your own +/-24 V supply if you prefer. A pair of modules can be mounted horizontally in a 19" metal or plexi 2U rackmount panel ($89 CDN), or in an aluminum case ($139 CDN). Up to eight modules can be rackmounted side by side in a 19" 4U metal rack ($189 CDN) or in a nice road case ($189 CDN). The modules themselves are just over $600 USD each. As good as these gems sound and look, this is a bargain. They will likely appreciate in value rather than depreciate like a mass-produced product and will doubtlessly give you years of gorgeous sound.

(Each module $679 CDN direct; www.sageelectronics.com) –Mark Rubel <mark@pogostudio.net>

RME
BOB-32 breakout box

This is one of those "why didn't they think of this sooner?" devices. If you use any type of DB25 connections—analog or digital—in your studio, you need to check out the *BOB-32*. Personally, I hate DB25 to fan snakes. They never spread enough to connect to my gear. I end up patching to the snake then to the gear or crawling behind the racks ten times a week. The *BOB-32* cleans all of that up as if you had a custom patch solution designed for your studio.

BOB-32 is an AES/EBU-compatible XLR to DB25 patch system with a twist—or should I say fold! RME calls the enclosure a "flip frame". This clever design features a hinge running through the middle of the chassis that allows you to actually fold the unit like a piece of bread—go online for photos. You're not forced to accept the standard front-to-back wiring scheme. If you want to have both front and back sections on the same side of the rack, you just fold the unit. The "front" has eight XLR ins and eight XLR outs. These feed to the "back" to a pair of female DB25 connectors. Fixed installations can put both sides in the backside of a rack to protect from unauthorized changes. If you have many studio visitors, you can put both sides on the front of the rack. I chose to put the DB25s out the back while keeping the XLRs up front.

Making the unit more versatile, each DB25 connector can be configured for TASCAM (Digidesign, RME) or Yamaha pin-types via an internal jumper. No cross-soldering mess just because you interface with different brands. Nice! Finally, the rack ears, thumb pullers, and hinge locking plates can be removed with a standard Phillips screwdriver. Depending on your software platform, a *BOB-32* could be used to replace an expensive outboard AES router. Add the ability to configure for your specific needs, and RME has one of the coolest routing devices I've seen in a long time. ($249 MSRP; www.rme-audio.com) –GH