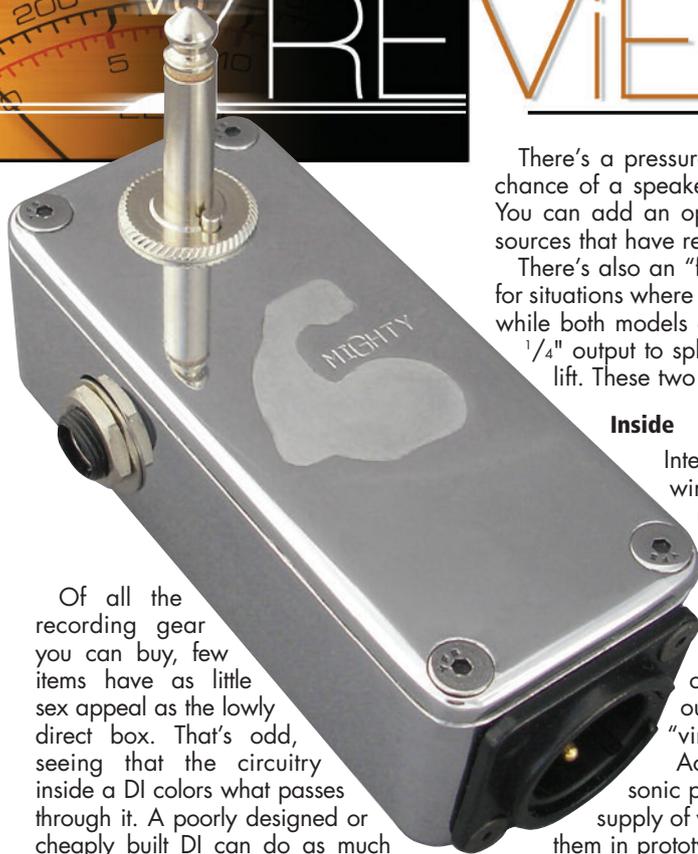




REVIEW

BY BILL STUNT



Of all the recording gear you can buy, few items have as little sex appeal as the lowly direct box. That's odd, seeing that the circuitry inside a DI colors what passes through it. A poorly designed or cheaply built DI can do as much

There's a pressure-sensitive switch at the base of the 1/4" plug that eliminates the chance of a speaker-shredding thump when instruments are plugged or unplugged. You can add an optional 6" Switchcraft female-to-male adaptor cable for use with sources that have recessed output jacks (like the Fender Strat).

There's also an "f" (female) model available that has the traditional 1/4" input jack for situations where you simply can't plug the Mighty G directly into an instrument. And while both models offer a male Switchcraft XLR output connector, there's no parallel 1/4" output to split the signal to send to an amp or monitor, nor is there a ground lift. These two features can be added by special order (the "s" model).

Inside

Internally the Mighty G is a thing of beauty; it's a Class A design hand-wired point-to-point—there are no integrated circuits. The Mighty G uses phantom power, negating weak-battery tonal woes.

The transformerless design incorporates highly-spec'd germanium transistors. Gearheads will be familiar with germanium transistors—they were integral to a lot of electronic designs in the '50s and '60s, like very early Neve consoles. Certain audio-philes swear by them in the preamp stage, claiming they come close to tube-like performance when pushed. They gradually fell out of use in the early '70s but they are still much coveted by the "vintage" crowd.

According to users (and Sage), germanium transistors have a distinct sonic profile that is very pleasant, almost magical. Sage sourced a good supply of vintage premium-quality germanium transistors and has been using them in prototype designs for several years.

Sage Electronics

damage to your recording as a bad microphone or compressor... and a really well-made DI can do equal amounts of good.

Sage Electronics, a small Canadian boutique audio company, has recently released the SE-DI3 Mighty G active direct box. It's a DI that Sage promises will deliver "almost magical" results. I'm up for a little magic in my recordings. How about you?

Meet the Mighty G

The Mighty G, right out of the box, looks and feels unique. It is obviously a quality build—the case is rugged die-cast aluminum. It has heft in your hand, even though it is a fraction of the size of most DIs I've had occasion to use, closer to the size and shape of a modest stomp pedal.

Also unique is the lack of a 1/4" input on the regular "m" (male) model. Instead, the unit has a 1/4" Switchcraft plug sticking out of the case—instead of running a guitar cable from the guitar output to the DI input, you literally plug the DI into your guitar (or bass, or keyboard, or stompbox) output. Sage claims this greatly reduces the risk of radio frequency or electromagnetic interference, since there is no cable between the instrument and the DI box.

SE-DI3 Mighty G Active Direct Box

A new design offers quality DI for discerning players

Can you hear the difference?

For the record, I used to pay very little attention to DIs in my day-to-day work as an engineer and producer. In fact, I've used the same DI for as long as I can remember. I don't even remember why I chose it. It works and it's reliable, but I don't think I've ever spent a second evaluating it sonically. My bad.

I tried out the Mighty G with all of the applications that I typically run into. I recorded bass guitar parts, keyboards, a range of acoustic guitars with piezo and magnetic pickups. I did back-to-back comparisons with recordings of the same material with my trusty day-to-day DI.

First up I tested my vintage 1950s National acoustic guitar. (It's a hybrid—a National neck bolted onto a Gibson J50 body.) Several years ago I had it outfitted with a decent-quality piezo pickup, but I've never been totally happy with the sound of that guitar going direct into a PA or a recording rig. I recorded a short finger-picked section with my standard DI and then recorded the exact same tune through the Mighty G.

Wow! What a difference. The first recording, using my standard DI, confirmed my distaste for the direct sound of this guitar/pickup combination. The second, with the Mighty G, sounded like a totally different instrument. The brittleness was gone. The midrange now had an authority that was missing in the first recording. The low end in general was defined yet creamy. It's an overused term, but 'warm' is the adjective I want to use to describe the sound. With just a minimal amount of eq I got a great-sounding recording, something not achievable with the first DI and any amount of eq.

I recorded bass parts as well through both DIs. Though not as dramatic, the difference was very apparent and just as satisfying. The Mighty G recording was far more complex and nuanced than the standard DI recording. The detail in the Mighty G recording was noticeably richer, rounder and solid sounding. I normally compress my bass tracks, but the Mighty

G recording did not really require compression. The sound was much more balanced over the complete range of the instrument.

Next up I plugged in an old acoustic outfitted with a magnetic sound-hole pick-up. This is a guitar that I love to play. It has a certain resistance that makes it ideal for bluesy material where you want to dig in. I often play it with a slide. I always record this guitar directly and reamplify during the mixing phase, dialing in an appropriate amp tone to suit the rest of the track.

Again there was a startling difference. The original, in comparison to the Mighty G, sounded thin and brittle, with little character in the mids and lows. The Mighty G recording sounded full and complex even before the reamping. The results of reamping back to one of my tube guitar amps were very satisfying.

I could go on, but suffice to say I got similar results doing back-to-back comparisons of recordings of various keyboards. The Mighty G captured nuance that I didn't even know I was missing. I am dying to try this unit with an old Wurlitzer or Fender Rhodes.

Final thoughts

I do question the value of not outfitting the default version of the Mighty G with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " output since for most live purposes, on stage or in the studio, the signal would get split back to an amp or a monitor. and in this uncertain world of live performance and recording, I think a ground lift switch is pretty much a necessity. I can't remember a live date where ground problems of one sort or another haven't been part of my trouble-shooting routine. Sage seems to feel that a lot of artists would rather save the money while getting great-sounding signals to a mixer or PA, but I would strongly recommend ponying up the extra dollars for the "optional" features.

That said, I have no problem getting behind this product. You'll pay a little more than you would for some DIs, but you will have long forgotten those few extra bucks when you're basking in the glow of your glorious new recordings. Even fully tricked out with the extra jack and the ground lift, you're still only putting out as much cash as you would for a modestly-priced quality microphone. My eyes—and ears—have been opened! ➤

Prices: SE-DI3 m and f, \$299 CDN each; SE-DI3 s (with ground lift and parallel $\frac{1}{4}$ " output), \$349 CDN

More from: Sage Electronics,
www.sageelectronics.com

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