



L.R. BAGGS ALIGN SERIES ACOUSTIC PEDAL SUITE: SESSION, EQUALIZER, REVERB, AND ACTIVE DI

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

VENERABLE ACOUSTIC-INSTRUMENT electronics manufacturer L.R. Baggs had the Winter NAMM Show abuzz over its new Align Series pedal suite aimed specifically at acoustic-electric guitarists. We're thrilled that they promptly sent review units ready for testing—and all together too, as a performance/recording system. The four distinctly acoustic-looking pedals featuring stained-wood graphics fit perfectly and snugly affixed to a MONO Pedalboard Lite Plus (\$129 street), all powered by a Truetone 1 Spot

AC adaptor and Multi Plug 5 Cable (\$29.90 street for both). To simulate a gig situation, Baggs also sent along its new Synapse Personal P.A. (\$1,999 street; review coming soon).

ALIGN SERIES SESSION

Essentially a compressor and gain pedal rolled into one, the Session (\$179 street) is designed to add oomph and richness for a studio-quality tone. Volume and Gain controls accommodate active or passive pickups. The magic here is in

the combination of analog saturation that brings a welcome balminess to cold piezo pickup signals, and multiband compression that evens out any rough sonic edges. The saturation effect isn't like typical overdrive or distortion—it's refined, and adds girth to an acoustic tone without being overbearing. And the compression isn't squashy, or even overt. It's a dynamically sensitive 3-band compressor that conducts subtle searches for problematic frequencies to smooth out. I got hooked on the fullness it provided, and

after playing with the Session a while, playing *without* it was a real letdown. If you simply want a bigger, better acoustic sound onstage or in the studio, audition the Session. It passed mine with flying colors, and receives an Editors' Pick Award.

Kudos Makes everything sound better in a beautifully subtle way.

Concerns None.

ALIGN SERIES EQUALIZER

Combining an FET gain stage with oodles of highly specified EQ tools in order to bolster and balance acoustic signals, the Equalizer (\$179 street) proved particularly handy for acoustics featuring electronics with minimal onboard controls, such as the test models used here: a Breedlove Legacy Concertina with an L.R. Baggs Anthem system, and a Taylor 814ce DLX with Expression System 2 electronics. The Align's variable High Pass Filter (40Hz, 80Hz, 120Hz) is automatically on if the pedal is engaged. I set it at 40Hz to attenuate only the lowest frequencies, and that alone turned out to be a huge help. I was truly surprised how much unnecessary low-end was muddying the waters without it, and that was especially true with significant amounts of reverb added. Other than the requisite Volume control, the Align EQ's main knob is an anti-feedback Garret Null Notch filter sweepable from 40 to 300Hz, and it's the way to start dialing-in a particular guitar's fullest tonal potential. The Breedlove sounded best using the Notch at 9 o'clock, while the Taylor sounded best with the Notch at noon. There are six fine-tuning dials, and Baggs chose frequency centers wisely. The beefy Breedlove came across more clearly with slight cuts at 85Hz, 350Hz, and a bit of an "air" boost at 10kHz. The Taylor benefitted from cuts at 10kHz,

4.8kHz, and 1.6kHz, and a slight kick at 85Hz. I had some difficulty making miniscule adjustments on the little black dials using my right hand due to my long fingernails for fingerstyle playing, so I went lefty. The white numbers below the dials were on the small side for my aging eyes—especially at a gig on a dark stage—so I dialed them by ear. While I was performing, I wound up wishing I could manipulate the little +/-6 dB Gain switch with my foot to raise the level for leads, or accommodate switching to a passive magnetic soundhole pickup. The Align Equalizer is a well-thought-out tone sculptor, but its über tweakability is a close-range deal. The obvious stage solution would be multiple units custom-dialed for each main acoustic.

Kudos Strong tone, smart flexibility.

Concerns Fine tuning not super stage friendly.

ALIGN SERIES REVERB

Baggs built this pedal to be specifically tailored for acoustic instruments, and wow, did they deliver! It's easily one of the finest reverbs I've ever heard for enhancing acoustic guitar, and distinctly different from common reverb pedals aiming to emulate a spring 'verb sound. Align Reverb (\$179 street) possesses an intoxicating regenerative quality as it blossoms, and its dispersion is seductively slow and even. The Reverb knob blends the succulent effect in with your original tone. Decay adjusts the amount of tail, and when pegged it goes to comet-like lengths—essentially endless. Ambient applications abound. The Volume knob is a global instrument level control, but the Tone knob is specific to the reverb effect. Turned way down, you get a dark undercurrent that's practically tidal. With the Tone control way up, the reverb ascends to the heavens, shimmering atop your

natural acoustic sound. I was blissed-out going headlong either direction, or with the dial set straight up at noon, which felt like the exact tonal sweet-spot for acoustic guitar enhancement. Even with copious amounts of effect, I never felt like the organic instrument tone was ever overly obscured. The Align Series Reverb is an acoustic guitar godsend, and an enthusiastic Editors' Pick!

Kudos Luscious, unique tonal quality is ideal for acoustic guitar. Capable of otherworldly ambiance and infinite decay trails.

Concerns None.

ALIGN SERIES ACTIVE DI

Baggs put its extensive DI experience in into the all-discrete Active DI (\$159 street), and loaded it with guitar-friendly functionality. Guitar players will be happy to hear it has XLR and 1/4" outputs (which can be used simultaneously), a volume pad for matching the XLR signal to the P.A., a Ground/Lift switch to eliminate ground-loop noise, phase inversion for fighting feedback, and a silent Mute foot-switch smack dab in the middle that's super handy for switching between acoustic guitars in different tunings. All said, the main takeaway is signal quality. The Align Active DI provides astonishing signal-to-noise ratio and gobs of headroom. The variance between plugging straight into the Synapse P.A. versus placing the Align Active DI in-between was transformative, and the comparison to a house DI at a place where I often play was dramatic. Not only did the house DI offer none of Baggs' guitar-friendly features, the Align Active DI's sonic superiority was easily evident.

Kudos Impeccable tone and massive headroom.

Concerns None.

Contact lrbaggs.com