

## Massive-Passive Sound in a Mini Langevin Box?

# Langevin Mini-Massive

By [Glenn Bucci](#) | May 2007

With frequency bands identical to bands one and four of Manley Labs' highly-regarded Massive Passive EQ, the same passive components (resistors and capacitors) and incredibly similar circuits, the brand new Langevin Mini-Massive is a two-band solid state "kid brother" stereo EQ that's generating quite a buzz. But while Manley claims that the main difference (besides number of bands) between the two boxes is that the four-band Massive Passive uses tubes for gain while the two-band Mini uses solid state Rapture gain blocks, I wasn't content to just take that word as gospel. So I requested a unit to investigate if that is where the similarities really begin and the differences end . . . here's what I found.

## INSIDE THE MINI-MASSIVE

Is the Langevin Mini-Massive really a Mini-Manley Massive Passive? Yes and no. Many of the same components are used in both, and the Rapture amps, while solid state, are super clean and fast (more akin to a GML, in terms of speed and neutrality, than a Langevin PEQ-2 or Pultec EQP-1A3.) Furthermore, the Mini-Massive is as meticulously constructed as its big brother — you won't find any cheap circuit boards here.

The Mini-Massive boasts a triple option toggle per band: boost, out, and cut. Another toggle selects between shelf or bell curves. A Bandwidth control alters the area and shape of each EQ curve-response. Having a shelf with the ability to control the slope is a great feature, lending the Mini to more flexible applications. With the Q control you can adjust the band to be wider or narrower. (Tip: A boosted signal generally sounds nicer with a larger Q, but when removing certain frequencies a smaller bell is more desirable. The reason why is that when you have a frequency that needs to be reduced, you don't want to alter the neighboring frequencies; instead you want more of a "concentrated" reduction. But for boosting, the larger bell definitely sounds more natural.)

On the high bands, there is a second Bell shape for the four highest frequencies — a feature that can be of great use as the bell is more concentrated on certain frequencies. "Bell 2" is not found on the Manley Massive Passive, but it is sure a welcome feature here on the Langevin unit. Another difference compared to the Manley Massive Passive: The four lowest shelf curves were reshaped for extra fatness, depth, and punch on the Langevin Mini-Massive.

A transformer switch on the back of the unit allows you to bypass the output transformer in the down position. In the middle position, the signal goes through the transformer, giving a slightly warmer and smoother color, while the upper position exaggerates the transformer by increasing even order distortions, meant to simulate some Class A British console circuits for a grittier sound. The difference between using the bypass or the transformer, at first, is subtle. But though the results may be minor on one track, when applied across, say, ten or more tracks, the effect can be cumulative.

## APPLYING THE MINI-MASSIVE

In a perfect world, we would all have a Massive Passive and a Mini-Massive in our studios. I say this because I've found that the Massive adds an almost supernatural color and touch to every signal that goes through it, whereas the Mini-Massive really excels at bringing out punchier, cleaner sounds while still resembling the crisp qualities of the Massive. As both boxes have their own separate personalities, I decided to use the Mini independent of the Massive in my chain . . . with the following results.

For a session where a bass guitar was recorded through a Mesa/Boogie amp with a BLUE Blueberry, going into a Langevin DVC and experiencing about -3dB of compression (courtesy of a Focusrite Compounder), I sent the signal through the Mini before A/D conversion. A gentle boost at 66Hz and 220Hz resulted in a much fuller, punchier, and three-dimensional sound. As the strings on the bass I recorded were getting a little old, I found that employing the Mini really helped restore the high end life to its sound. And while I've managed some good results for EQ plug-ins (namely Waves and UAD products), the clarity and berth afforded by the Mini was unlike anything a plug-in could synthesize. Where many EQs (especially plug-ins) tend to give the impression that they are merely layering a separate signal on top of a track, the Mini managed cohesion, sounding like part of the original signal.

On a stereo piano track, I boosted a tad at 3kHz and reduced a bit at 680Hz, resulting in a more even sound that made matching the left and right sides pretty easy. For some 2-bus mixes, this technique added more weight in the low end and a little more sparkle in the top. On other mixes, reducing some of the low mids with the Mini reduced clutter. However, there were times when the Massive Passive, or any more flexible EQs, made for a better choice (such as an Empirical Labs Lil FrEQ, which is both clean-sounding and allows for more precise surgery.) But make no mistake, for 2-bus mixes where the

top end needs enhancement and the lows demand more control, the Mini did a great job. Furthermore, if you have a single track that requires a more flexible EQ, combining the left and right channels will give you four bands with which you can work. I recommend trying this (except in the case of a 2-bus mix, or going through a stereo keyboard). This kind of enhanced control keeps the Mini from coming off as too limiting with its lack of continuous sweep control; and the fact that there are 48 frequencies per channel to work with is just awesome.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are hundreds of EQs out on the market, and there is no magic box for every studio application. If you're looking for extra iron and punch, a Great River or Neve Portico may be a better choice than the Mini due to their more aggressive treatments. But for gentle signal adjustment — to add more sparkle and fullness while still retaining the original sound — the Mini is a great choice. It adds punch, reduces harsh frequencies, and aids in allowing your tunes to breathe better. And while it's not as "colorful" as a Massive Passive, it's a great complement to the aforementioned unit, and a good option for those who are looking for a cheaper alternative without sacrificing that Manley touch.

Are there any major minuses to the Mini? As said before, having four bands for each channel would be nice, but besides that I can find nothing to complain about. The Mini is a high quality unit with enough flex room between ultra clean, gentle color, and the grittier British console EQ sounds we all love. It doesn't look like Manley is getting this one back from me (time to talk to my checking account); it's racked right under my Langevin DVC . . . and it's looking (and sounding) quite happy.

### JUST THE FACTS

**Product type:** Single rack space, two-band solid state stereo EQ.

**Target market:** Pro-project and professional studios.

**Strengths:** High quality components. Great sound. Unique character.

**Limitations:** Two-band design can be a bit limiting at times.

**Price:** \$2,800 (list)

**Contact:** [www.manleylabs.com](http://www.manleylabs.com)

### QUICK EQ TIPS FOR THE MINI-MASSIVE

In order to get the best mix possible, many times you have to apply EQ to some degree on your tracks. However, no EQ should be treated as a magic fix: If there is a problem at the source it needs to be addressed at the source. If your acoustic guitar track has too much low end, try positioning the mic so that it's above the guitar to combat that. And if your vocalist is sounding too high and thin, try moving him or her closer, taking advantage of the proximity effect. Don't just run to your EQ.

It's wise to avoid EQing and compressing during the tracking process. However, I recommend adding a 1 or 2dB boost around 12kHz if you need more air in your tracks right away, or boosting around 100kHz to add weight to a track. This has always struck me as safe enough during the tracking.

But once you get to the mix, try not to boost all your frequencies and work down. Boosting reduces headroom, and you can get great results by reducing your frequencies initially as well.

Make sure to review your mix regularly, and make sure that instruments needing separation from one another aren't fighting for the same frequency space (i.e., keyboard vs. guitar; kick drum vs. bass). If you're getting a clash, try cutting one source back while subtly increasing the other. By doing this, you'll retain headroom while adding clarity to each individual instrument in your mix.

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