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## UNCAGED

### Effectrode Blackbird Vacuum Tube Preamp

In a nutshell, the Effectrode Blackbird is a tube amp's entire preamp section in a floor unit. And just why the heck would someone want that?

The Blackbird is housed in a heavy metal chassis with a Daka-ware knobs and high-grade components. It's no accident that the box's tubes are accessible on top, allowing the user to easily switch valves to fit their tonal needs, even on the fly. An external switch on the rear allows rebiasing for 12AX7, 12AU7, and 12AY7 preamp tubes, while an internal trim will accommodate other tube types such as dual-stage miniature B9A tubes like 12AV7s and 12AT7s.

Arriving outfitted with three 12AX7 tubes, the Blackbird has two channels with a three-band EQ on each. The first channel is a

replica of a vintage Fender blackface circuit, covering sonic territory from clean to nicely overdriven with warm textures galore. The second channel picks up from there with an additional Gain control, going from mid-gain Marshall plexi to Dumble-style heavy saturation. Using the tube-buffered output, the Blackbird was tested with a small tube combo, resulting in serious "stack tone." The transformation was shocking and delightful – with the Effectrode smacking its front end, the 15-watt 1x10 sounded more like a 50-watt 2x12.

In addition, the Blackbird can be sent into a mixer, PA, power amp, or digital interface for gigs or recording, using the Transformer Balanced Out function. The Blackbird was also tested into a Line 6 home-

studio interface and cut cool, usable tracks in GarageBand via the buffered output. Even on tracks using Apple's software amp simulations, the Blackbird yielded a huge difference – these sounded much more organic, convincing, and indeed tube-like than typical.

In all, the tones here won't disappoint. Big, glassy cleans and naturally compressed crunch are but a few of the highlights and, again, the Blackbird made that small tube combo rage against the machine. There's also a voicing switch on the back that goes from Classic to Creamy for even more high-gain textures.

This is the entire front end of a seriously good tube amp, but in a floor unit that can be tossed into a gig bag. – **Pete Prown VG**

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Price: \$469 (list)  
Info: [effectrode.com](http://effectrode.com)