

PLEXI TONE, NAILED

Voodoo Amp's V-Plex

Marshall's famed 1960s "plexi" and early-'70s 50-/100-watt amps gained notoriety for their fantastic tones. Of course, the downside was that they had to be driven hard to sound their best, which to the player (and anyone else in a mile-wide radius) meant volume – a lot of volume. And that sometimes meant turning speaker cabinets toward walls or employing an impromptu blanket muffler, sacrificing tone for the sake of band harmony and/or the mix. Then there was the consistency factor from one amp to the next, which meant hunting down the best-sounding Marshalls became an expensive game.



Price: Head; \$2,295 (retail). 4x12" cabinet; \$1,295 (retail).

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In short, when it comes to plexi tone, maybe those weren't the "good old days." Perhaps now, in our world of reissues, reproduction, and boutique guitars and amplifiers, guitarists are indeed in the midst of a golden age. If you doubt that's the case, let us introduce the Voodoo Amplification V-Plex.

Voodoo Amps was founded in 1998 when hardcore tone lover Trace Allen Davis, a professional guitarist and proficient guitar/amp/pedal fixer, began modifying amplifiers. Largely dissatisfied with the offerings of the day, his idea of good tone caught on, and he quickly earned a reputation as a capable, comprehensive amp repair/modification shop.

The V-Plex was "cloned" from an early-1968 Marshall that was serviced by Voodoo and later was purchased by Davis. It was then reverse-engineered, including having its transformers sent to Mercury Magnets for duplication. Upon completion, the V-Plex was A/B tested next to the original. Davis says it sounded identical.

We were offered a listen to the 50-watt V-Plex with Voodoo's propriety-design 4x12" slant cabinet. The hand-wired V-Plex is a four-input/two-channel amp with three 12AX7 tubes in the preamp and two EL34s in the power section. It has a single set of controls for Presence, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master and Volume – a layout identical to that of a vintage non-master-volume Marshall. The V-Plex's Master volume is placed between the phase-inverter tube and the power tubes, which gives the player the ability to dial in plexi-like distortion starting at a very reasonable volume.

On/off and standby switches, along with a red indicator, also occupy the front panel.

A look inside reveals flawless workmanship and top-quality components. Davis is, as we said, very much about the look and feel of guitar tone, and the research he put into this head is glaringly obvious. The cabinet uses four Celestion G12M "greenback" speakers, which are seen in amps all over the place.

GEARIN' UP

Ritter RP Series



Ritter's RP2000 Series polyurethane hardshell guitar cases feature protection against impact, a water-repellent polyester cover, music and accessory pouches, a padded, adjustable backpack system, and reflective safety strap. Learn more at ritter-bags.com.

Seymour Duncan Twin Tube Classic



Seymour Duncan's SFX-03 Twin Tube Classic is a two-channel guitar preamp that uses two subminiature NOS 6021 dual-triode tubes. It has volume and gain control for each channel and provides three channels to a single-channel amp. See more at seymourduncan.com.

But Voodoo's cab is a little tricked out; aside from its proprietary internal design, it is also capable of operating at either 4 ohms or 16 ohms in mono, as well as 8 ohms in stereo.

No doubt about it – the V-Plex talks the talk. But to see whether it walked the walk, we recruited a Schecter 006 solidbody with two high-output humbuckers, and a Fender Stratocaster with three Duncan Alnico single-coils. We plugged in the Schecter and started with the V-Plex's controls set in a familiar plexi manner; Bass at 10, Presence at 4, Mids at 6, Treble at 2, Master between 8 and 9, and Volume pushed to 8.

Flashback

If you're a fan of the original Marshall JTM 45/50/100 models (if you're a fan of *real* rock guitar tones, that's *you!*), plugging in the V-Plex could well be the ultimate experience, especially if you're not hip to coughing up the money to obtain (and hassle to care for) a vintage Marshall. *Tone* – gain-rich harmonics, with that clear, articulate crunch we've come to lust after – spews from the V-Plex by the truckload.

To test the effectiveness of the Master volume circuit, we rolled off the Master and brought the Volume control up a touch, and heard fistfuls of rich gain at reasonable SPLs. Yes, Virginia, you can get great plexi tone at comfortable levels.

The tone knobs reacted almost exactly like those in the original plexi circuit in that they don't alter the tone much, but produce different *textures*. Back-

ing off the volume and increasing the Master yielded a cleaner crunch that never surrendered its true character. “Jumping” input channels (a favorite trick of four-input-Marshall owners) substantially fattened the tone.

We next plugged in the Stratocaster. To keep high-end response where we liked it required rolling back the Treble and Presence controls, but the Strat also proffered fat, meaty tone from every pickup and selector-switch position.

Crossing channels again, we got more meat right up until we pushed it too hard, when (in true plexi form) the signal compressed beyond the point of being enjoyable.

If you're after the ultimate vintage

plexi tone, your search could very well end right here, as the Voodoo V-Plex delivers definitive plexi tone, and has the ability to play at comfortable levels. Davis and his crew nailed it. — **Bob Tekippe/Ward Meeker**

TONEFUL TAG-TEAM

VVT's Lindy Fralin Model amplifier

Maryland-based amplifier builder Vintage Vacuum Tube Amplifiers (you may know it as VVT) recently fielded a request from renowned pickup winder Lindy Fralin. He wasn't looking for advice on wire or how hot to wind a pickup for best interaction with a particular VVT; rather, Fralin wanted an amp built to his specs and taste. And not just for him, but for the mass market. VVT, realizing the co-branding possibilities, jumped at the opportunity.

So, what does a tone guru like Fralin want in an amplifier? Well, he says the goal was “a clean, full-body-voiced amp that's lightweight and able to sound good at low volume.” Sounds like something we'd like, too. So when VVT asked whether we wanted to hear it, we were happy to take up the offer.

At first glance, the VVT Lindy Fralin amp looks boutique in a way we've come to expect; i.e. it sports point-to-point wiring with carbon-comp resistors, an all-tube circuit, and a 12AX7-driven spring reverb and preamp. *But*, go deeper and you'll quickly discover some seldom-seen features, like a trick self-biasing-cathode design that allows the player to switch between a pair of 6L6s (for 30 watt of output) and a pair of 6V6s (for 15-watts) without having to re-bias the amp. **Part of its secret is a custom-wound Mercury Magnetics transformer designed specifically for the Fralin that allows the amp to switch between the 6L6s and 6V6s while maintaining stable impedance for the tubes and speaker load.**

The amp ships with a pair of 6L6s, but will also accept 5881s or JJ 6V6s, for an altogether different favor. Another unique feature is Fralin's choice of a single 15" alnico-magnet Weber speaker instead of the more traditional pair of 10" or single 12" speaker.

The overall look and layout of the amp is different, as well, but still boasts a vintage vibe with a neatly executed off-white tolex, oxblood grillecloth, top-mounted controls, and heavy-duty

leather handle. There are no metal or plastic corner protectors, and no extraneous piping or badging. Its look is clean, simple, and classic. The control layout is accordingly succinct, with a single 1/4" input, a switch for Bright, and controls for Volume, Treble, Bass and Reverb, along with switches for Power and Standby. Also worthy of mention is the 11-foot power cord.

VVT shipped our tester with a matched pair of 6L6s by TAD and a matched pair of 6V6s by JJ. We started with the TAD 6L6s and our test guitars—a Fender Relic Strat and a Hofner Verythin Classic with mini-humbuckers. After plugging in the Relic Strat and letting the amp warm up, we set the Volume at 3 o'clock, Bass and Treble at 12, and then we hammered a few chords.

We were immediately impressed with the amp's complex overtones, its round, punchy low-end response, and its snappy highs. It didn't take much noodling or knob tweaking to realize that the tone controls on this amp, along with its Bright switch, are exceedingly well-voiced. From a player's perspective, that means it's easy to find likeable sounds. The Bright switch compensates nicely for the slightly darker sound of mini- or full-size humbuckers, while the wide sweep of the Bass control keeps its frequencies full and punchy with single-coils.

While the amp is voiced for clean tones, it also does a good job when it comes time to get dirty, and is very responsive to changes in pick attack or guitar output. Simply backing down the volume control on the guitar and easing up on our pick attack, the Fralin cleaned up from moderately dirty overdrive with musical overtones to a sparkling clean sound that didn't lose any of its life or attitude.

We popped in the matched set of JJ 6V6s and checked the tone at 15 watts output. The amp broke up quickly and had a slightly more boxy sound, with reduced complexity of overtones; still very lively and punchy, just not as big as 6L6s—fantastic for low-volume situations. The tube-driven reverb is also well-voiced. At lower settings, it adds a bit of ambiance that doesn't get in the way or wash out the amp's tone, and at higher settings it's suitably splashy.

The boys at Vintage Vacuum Tube do a killer job on the Fralin signature amp. It's loaded with big, dynamic, single-coil-friendly tone (that sounds pretty good with humbuckers, too!) in a nice, lightweight package. — **Phil Feser**



Price: \$1,799 (retail).

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