

Lightning Strikes Thrice:
 (left to right) Ampeg
 PortaBass PCB2210,
 Eden CXC-110 Time
 Traveler and Ashdown
 ABM C110-300 EVO



Small Soldiers Ampeg PortaBass PCB2210, Ashdown ABM C110-300 EVO, David Eden CXC-110 Time Traveler

By **Emile Menasché**

I DOUBT THAT the wag who coined the phrase “bigger is better” ever had to haul around a full-size bass amp. Big bass amps do have their place, but they’re impractical for rehearsal (unless you leave the amp at the studio), recording and many club gigs, where the soundman may take one look and forbid you to turn it up much past, say, zero.

But as this trio of portable combos suggests, you don’t need to be an Olympic weightlifter to deliver the sound of the gods. Each of these mighty mites boasts professional features, like a powerful EQ, an effects loop, an extension cabinet output and a direct output, which lets you use your combo as a front end to a larger house or stage system (see “Amp Camp” on page 87 for tips on this procedure). And while they’re very studio friendly, they also boast power ratings that belie their size, thereby vanquishing the plague of small combos: lack of headroom. These room shakers may not be cheap—each has a list price of more than \$1,100—but all possess features and sound quality that excel in critical professional situations.



DAVID EDEN CXC-110 TIME TRAVELER

The Time Traveler’s name may imply a vintage bent, but this combo, which features a 230-watt power section feeding a 10-inch driver with a coaxial tweeter, isn’t living in retro land. Not that it can’t dish out a warm, full sound—that’s probably its chief strength—but this American-made combo sports some decidedly modern features. They include a very good built-in compressor, a specially designed enhance control that simultaneously adds low-end punch and high-end bite, and a dizzying array of I/O options that make it equally at ease in the studio, small venue or large stage.

The Time Traveler’s basic controls comprise an input level switch, preamp gain, master volume, three-band EQ (you can shift the

midrange between two center frequencies), compressor threshold and the aforementioned enhance knob, which can add punch and sparkle to your tone. You can bypass the EQ with the push of a button—a useful trick when dealing with fussy recording engineers. There are also separate low- and high-boost switches—essentially, “smart” loudness controls that use the Fletcher-Munson curve to correct EQ at low levels—although the low boost should be used with caution; with it engaged, low notes seemed to overwork the speakers at moderate-to-high volume levels. However, Eden makes a companion extension cabinet for the TT that allows you to take full advantage of the combo’s extended low end.

The tweeter delivers quite a bit of top-end detail, and the treble controls let you emphasize or tame this as needed. Although the EQ is powerful, the amp works just as well at producing a natural, unhypped sound. My personal preference was running the amp with the enhance control at a minimum. The Time Traveler can sound clean and tight, with plenty of detail, but you can also engage the warm touch to generate some creamier, tubelike tones. A front-panel trim pot lets you preset the

THE DEETS

Model	Ampeg PortaBass 2210	Ashdown ABM C110-500 EVO	David Eden CX-110 Time Traveler
Price	\$1,499.00	\$1,149.90	\$1,149.90
Dimensions (w x h x d)	17"x26"x13.75"	20.3"x18.6"x14"	15.25"x20.5"x14.5"
Weight	53 lbs.	55 lbs.	39 lbs.
Preamp/Poweramp	Solid-state/Solid-state	Solid-state + Tube (1x12AX7)/Solid-state	Solid-state/Solid-state
Power	250 watts (4 ohms)	320 watts (8 ohms)	230 (8 ohms)
Speaker	(2) 10" custom design neodymium magnet drivers; (1) 1" compression driver	(1) 10" Ashdown BlueLine driver	(1) 10" driver with coaxial tweeter
Crossover Frequency	3.5kHz	n/a	4kHz
Volume Controls	Gain, Master	Input (gain); Input Mix, Output (Master Volume), Mute	Input Gain switch (+10dB), Gain; Warm switch; Warm trim pot; Compressor (threshold); Master Volume; Mute; Speaker Off
Tone Controls	Knobs: Low; +/-14dB @ 100Hz; Low Mid; +/-15dB @ 270Hz or 400Hz (determined by Shift switch); High Mid +/-14dB @ 900Hz or 1.9kHz (shift in); High +/-13dB @ 6kHz Switches: Ultra Low; +6dB @ 40Hz; Ultra High; +8dB @ 10kHz	Knobs: Bass +/-15dB @ 50Hz; Mid +/-15dB @ 660Hz; Treble 7kHz shelving; Sliders (all +/-15dB): 180Hz; 340Hz; 1.3kHz; 2.6kHz; Switches: Shape in/out (+8dB @ 50Hz and 4kHz; -4dB @ 400Hz); EQ Bypass; Subharmonic Bypass; Subharmonic Level (introduces harmonic octave below original)	Knobs: Enhance; Bass; +/-15dB @ 30Hz; Mid +/-15dB @ 550Hz or 2.2kHz (determined by Shift switch); Treble; +/-15dB @ 2kHz; Switches: Dynamic Boost Bass; Dynamic Boost treble; EQ bypass
Inputs	Front Panel: 1/4" OdB, 1/4" -12dB; Rear Panel: 1/4" Effects Return	Front Panel: 1/4" High Gain; 1/4" Low Gain; Rear Panel: 1/4" Line Input; 1/4" Effects Return; 1/4" footswitch connections for Output Mute, Sub Mute, EQ/Shape Bypass	Front Panel: (2) x 1/4" Instrument inputs; Rear Panel: 1/4" Power Amp In; (2) 1/4" Auxiliary inputs; 1/4" Effects Return
Outputs	1/4" Line Out; XLR Balanced Line Out (switches for Pre/Post EQ and Ground lift); 1/4" Effects Send	Front Panel: XLR D.I. output with Pre/Post EQ switch; 1/4" Tuner Out; 1/4" Subwoofer Out; Rear Panel: 1/4" Effect Send; 1/4" and Speaker outputs	XLR D.I. w/Level control and Ground lift; 1/4" Effects Send; 1/4" Preamp Out; 1/4" Tuner Out; (2) 1/4" speaker outputs; Speaker speaker output
Effects Loop	Parallel with front panel Blend control	Serial	Serial
Manufacturer	Ampeg, an affiliate of St. Louis Music, Inc., 1400 Ferguson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63133; (314) 727-4512, (800) 727-4512; ampeg.com	HNB Communications USA, Inc., 743 Cochran St., Buildings 8 & F, Simi Valley, CA, 93065-1976, (805) 579 6490; www.hnbusa.com	Eden Electronics, a Division of U.S. Music Corp., 444 E. Courtland St., Mundelein, IL 60060; (847) 949-0444, (800) 877-6863; eden-electronics.com

amount of the effect. Add a judicious amount of compression and you'll be rewarded with a very sweet, vintage sound that's perfect for roots rock and vintage funk/r&b styles.

The Eden is extremely well constructed, and the colorful front panel is easy to read—an asset on a dark stage. Other useful stuff: the XLR D.I. output has a level control, and the front panel gives you access to the dedicated tuner output, a headphone jack and a speaker mute.

Overall, the Time Traveler delivers warm, rich tone and solid performance for both four- and five-string instruments.

AMPEG PORTABASS PBC2210

While Ampeg is generally revered for its full-size heads and cabs, the recent PortaBass line represents the next wave in the company's embrace of combo design. Judging by the PortaBass PBC2210, traditional Ampeg values like pure power and pushing air are very much a part of their smaller series as well.

Powered by a 250-watt power section, the PortaBass PBC2210 features two 10-inch neodymium drivers (a 1x12-inch model is

also available), and cranks out a robust bottom end with ample headroom and plenty of volume. The tone controls are relatively simple. There's a four-band EQ, as well as low- and high-boost switches. The low-mid and high-mid bands have shift switches that let you optimize them for your instrument and style. The EQ has nice wide curves that really enhance the sound of the test basses without completely transforming them. For more bottom end, you can engage the ultra low boost switch. When you do, you'll appreciate the two brawny 10-inch speakers' ability to keep their composure. And while it doesn't have a front-end compressor, the Ampeg does offer a power section limiter that can save your speakers from damage. You can add an outboard compressor—or another effect of your choosing—via the parallel effects loop.

The PortaBass has several design touches that will be especially welcomed by professional working musicians, including built-in wheels, a detachable

AMP CAMP

Direct Hits and Split Signals

By Lawrence Kern

The soundman at the club last night wanted to use a DI box to take a signal from my bass amp. I told him, "That's what the amp's direct output is there for, dude." Who's right?

—Derek Stiltz, Seattle, WA

I have to go with the soundman on this one. In performance situations, soundmen typically like to mic an amplifier, then combine its signal with a direct signal from the amp, which preserves the low end and sends a strong, full-spectrum sound to the desk.

Like most new bass heads, yours has a direct balanced output. However, few of the balanced outputs found on these amps have the features that are useful to a soundman, like a level control and a ground lift, which is extremely useful when dealing with questionable electricity or lines shared with lighting systems.

What's more, in many instances it will be better to use a DI box than to use the head alone. For instance, if your amp's direct output is wired after the head, it may add noise to your signal. In addition, the direct signal from your head may be too "hot" for the soundman's mixing desk, and unless the direct output has an attenuating pad—a switch that dampens the output volume—it will be useless. And remember: should your amp fail, a DI box will ensure that your signal is still going to the house and to the monitors.

If you're concerned that the DI box will change your tone, then

be aware of how your amp's DI line sounds, test the soundman what kind of tone you're looking for and ask his opinion on the best way to achieve it.

My drummer told me I should try bi-amping. Do you think he's gay?

—Danny Sanders, Houston, TX

No, Danny, I don't. Bi-amping is a method of amplification in which the signal from a preamp is split into bands of high and low frequencies by means of a crossover. Each band is then sent to a different amplifier, power stage and, subsequently, to separate speaker cabinets, typically one with small drivers (e.g., a 4x10), to handle the high frequencies, and another with one or more large drivers (e.g., a 1x15), for the low frequencies.

The rationale behind bi-amping is simple: low frequencies require more power to achieve the same volume as high frequencies. To compensate for this, some manufacturers design their amplifiers to produce more power in the low-frequency range. (The Gallien-Krueger BOORB, for example, has 300 watts on the low end and 100 watts on the high.) Bear in mind, if you sent your high end through a subwoofer, your tone would probably become muddy, because the driver would not be receiving enough power to properly recreate the frequencies. Conversely, if you sent your low frequencies to the 10-inch speakers, they would have less "thump" than they would through the subwoofer.

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transport handle and a tilt-back stand. You also get both XLR and 1/4-inch line outs, and the XLR can be sent either pre or post EQ. The PortaBass' construction is generally solid, though the EQ section switches did feel a little light to the touch.

However, the bottom line is that the Ampeg PBC2210 is a solid performer that excels at a wide range of studio and live situations. It delivers a serious slew of cool sounds and is especially happening for rock, metal and funk, where you need a little undistorted added depth and power in the low end.

ASHDOWN ABM C110-300 EVO

When it comes to design, British manufacturer Ashdown always seems to take a step off the beaten path, and the ABM C110-300 EVO Bass Magnifier is no exception. Sure, its front-ported cabinet and 10-inch speaker are nothing unusual, but it delivers a hair-raising 320 watts and sports several features that stand out from the pack, including a hybrid preamp that consists of both tube and solid-state gain stages and a mix control for blending the two. There's also a built-in VU meter (to help you find the optimal input level) and a combination rotary/graphic EQ.

The Ashdown's powerful seven-band EQ features an unusual twist: four graphic EQ sliders (two pre and two post the rotary mid control) augment the bass, middle and treble controls. I found the sliders to be an interesting alternative to the "shift" found on other bass amp EQs. With seven bands always active, you can dial up a sound very



quickly and with little thought. You can also bypass the EQ globally with the flip of a switch. If that's not enough, you also get a "sub-harmonics" control that produces harmonics an octave below the note you play, and a "shape" control, which adds punch to the signal. The Ashdown can reach some powerful lows considering its compact profile, but at times the amp's sheer power over-

whelmed the cabinet—especially with the subharmonics engaged.

The EQ isn't the only means to alter your tone. By setting the input mix control to grind, you can introduce a fair amount of drive to the signal, especially if the input level is cranked. I liked the tube stage at moderate input levels, where the amp sounded warm but not fuzzy. The Ashdown provides a range of interface options, too. Line-out connections are easily accessible on the front panel, as are outputs for a tuner and subwoofer, while effects and footswitch connections are on the back panel. (Foot-switchable EQ and mute are major helps onstage.) My only complaint concerns the side-mounted handles. While I appreciate that they encourage the correct lifting technique (bend those knees!), it would have been cool if Ashdown had also included a top-mounted handle.

Nevertheless, the Ashdown manages to remain flexible while delivering a distinct and identifiable sound. This well-made amp can cover a lot of styles and, ultimately, help you find your own voice on the bass.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While each has its own personality, the amps we tested share the ability to dial up an array of sounds for a wide range of applications, to fill the room with thumpin' bass and to act as a front end for a larger house system should the need arise. Time to cancel your gym membership, grab your ax and go. ■

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