

PRO AUDIO REVIEW



Cheap Trick
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Gear & Software Reviews For The End-User

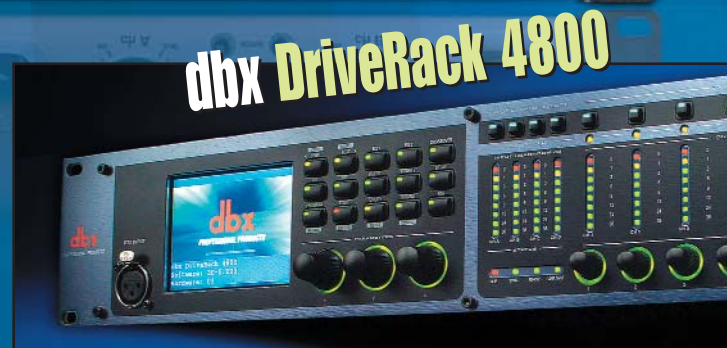
July 2006

Live Sound Amplifier Issue!



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BY DAVID RITTENHOUSE

A few years ago, I reviewed the DriveRack 480, so in turn I will review the new flagship for dbx, the 4800. The 480 was a great unit breaking new ground for dbx; but has dbx changed and fixed some of its limitations? The bigger question here is, as most manufacturers tend to update their products from year to year, has dbx actually improved on their product or just put it in a prettier box? Can the 4800 turn heads and budgets like its predecessor? Let's find out what the hype is all about.

FEATURES

The 4800 (\$4,999) starts off with a new, powerful 96 kHz DSP (which is switchable down to 48 kHz) engine. Dbx has kept the standard configuration of four inputs to eight outputs found on the 480 and from other competitors. These are improved upon by adding fully digital ins and outs via AES/EBU XLR connectivity. You can also order the 4800 with the optional CobraNet if desired. One of the hippest new features is the QVGA display that shows, in color, all the routing and processing in the signal chain. This, along with the new accessibility brought on by the integration of the HiQnet/System Architect, allows full labeling of all in and outs. No more chart sheets of program numbers and which output does what; it is all right on the screen in front of you. New to the 4800 is an output gain control knob on the face of the unit below each output meter. This knob also doubles as the mute for its output with a lighted ring denoting red for

Fast Facts

Applications:

Live sound, sound reinforcement, installation

Key Features:

Four in/eight out; 96 kHz; onboard DSP; Ethernet HiQnet/System Architect control

Price:

\$4,999

Contact:

dbx at 801-568-7660,
www.drive-rack.com, www.dbxpro.com.

dbx DriveRack 4800



mute and green for on.

Within the 96 kHz DSP you have full band-pass filters, plus crossover and routing configurations with Bessel, Butterworth, and Linkwitz-Riley filters. Every input also has a 31-band graphic and a nine-band parametric EQ. You also have two selectable insert points per input and output for dynamics processing such

IN USE

The 4800 has been with me for months now. It was only supposed to be on loan for a couple of shows but I could not let it leave. I have taken it out on everything from gospel acts to Baltimore Symphony Orchestra performances. It functions in a much more logical way than the old 480, with control and accessibility features

Now, it is great to talk about the control and functional ease of the 4800; but how does it sound? Well, in a word, great!

as the classic dbx compression and limiting, noise gates, de-essers, AutoWarmth (dbx says – 'AutoWarmth is a dynamic enhancement designed to compensate for the ears' loss in low frequency response as the signal level decreases'), subharmonic synthesis and advanced feedback suppression. Dynamic range has been rated at 113 dB A-weighted, with a frequency response of <10 Hz –50 kHz (+0/-3 dB at 96 kHz). Available input delay is selectable up to 682 ms, and output delay is selectable up to a total of 1,365 ms (shared between the outputs).

Controlling the DriveRack 4800 is quite a bit different than the old 480. Dbx no longer offers the remote like they did with the 480R, but it can now be controlled via Ethernet (HiQnet) to your own tablet PC. You can even go wireless by using a wireless router. The use of HiQnet/System Architect also allows access to other units like Crown I-Tech series amps. All of this is now integrated and controlled at your fingertips (tablet pen) for your entire system.

that are unrivaled. The ability to control the entire system wirelessly is great for when you have a multi-zoned set-up. You can walk into the zone mute, un-mute and EQ for that zone instantaneously. I say instantaneously but when working from the wireless Ethernet there can be some lag so for show time application it is good to revert back to a hardwired set-up.

One of the most improved features is the speaker processing and pre-EQ functions. Rivaling the old 480, on which you could run out of filters or have filters that were not variable, all of your processing needs are taken care of by the new 4800. What this means is you can accurately match the manufacturer's specs for each speaker, including driver alignment delays. So your system can now sound like it was meant to out of the box.

The addition of the HiQnet/System Architect control protocol is fabulous. You can now, in real time, fully integrate your entire system. No more multiple programs running on your laptop (e.g. one for the

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► *dbx from page 10*

amps, one for the processing, one for the digital EQ – now it all comes together). And no more weird adapters like a RS232-to-USB just to run your laptop; it's all over



Ethernet! The 4800 works best when connected to a tablet-style PC for its ability to

manipulate functions via touch screen. Ringing out a room can now be done with just a stroke or two of the pen. One of my later complaints about the 480 was it was very hard to get in and around the unit without having the remote. On the 4800 you can access everything from the front panel and nothing is more than a one or

two button push. I mentioned earlier about the labeling of all your ins and outs per pro-

Product Points

Plus:

- + 96 kHz DSP
- + Full color QVGA display
- + HiQnet
- + Gain/mute knobs on the front panel with lighted rings

Minus:

- People stuck in the archaic 1990s might feel left out
- The overwhelming urge to get a tablet PC

The Score:

More than just an upgrade and totally new and much better product!

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190 View Circle Felton, CA 95018
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gram. This is a great time saver especially for a company like ours that has upwards of 40 different programs for all combinations of speakers and applications. For the old 480 we had a full sheet charted out per program of the input and corresponding output that you would have to reference every time you used it. Now it is all on the front panel display in full color.

Now, it is great to talk about the control and functional ease of the 4800; but how does it sound? Well, in one word great. It is just as good and better than the 480 due to the 96 kHz upgrade and greater “tuneability” of the pre and post EQ. If you have used any product from the DriveRack family you will be doubly impressed by the 4800.

SUMMARY

Over the years I have noticed what seems to be an evolutionary/de-evolutionary ebb and flow to mankind's pursuit towards perfection. We never achieve perfection, but we always seem to get closer, and I think dbx has its greatest shot at it yet with the 4800. They have beat all the shortcomings from its predecessor and forged ahead with future thought, to not only how this unit will be used today, but also next year and years after.

David Rittenhouse is a senior live sound engineer at RCI Sound Systems and a regular contributor to Pro Audio Review.

Review Setup:

Yamaha PM5D, Yamaha 3500-40 consoles; EAW KF760, KF761, KF730, KF300 speakers; laptop PC.