

SPECIAL REPORT



Emperor Mojo'q

A “straight wire with gain” processor—without the gain

REVIEW BY WALTER STITES

Once in a while, there comes a device that advances the art of recorded music in a way that just makes you say “Hmmm.” This is where I’d place the Mojo’q, the new audio processor from Emperor, the analog-hardware division of famed audio firm Presta.

It’s really hard to put into words exactly what the Mojo’q does—you have to hear it, and not everyone will pick up on it at once.

All dressed up

The Mojo’q features machined aluminum controls, reminiscent of Disco-era home stereos, on an “Emperor Purple” faceplate. From left to right: a rotary selector for Classic, Vintage, Commercial, or Modern; a Truth/Hype selector button; three continuously variable pots for Vibe, Mojo, and Attitude; and Stereo Link, Bypass, and Talkback buttons.

Around back, the Mojo’q exhibits the sparsest rear panel in the realm: XLR In and Out and nothing else—not even a power jack. So this must be a passive device, right? Wrong! As the Emperor folks assured me, there’s more inside its welded-shut chassis than meets the eye.

Inductive reasoning

The Mojo’q is powered by Emperor’s new Phantasm Power technology, which combines two wireless powering schemes: inductive coupling (similar to the charging method for many low-power cordless devices) and radio charging (as used in certain medical implants and personal entertainment devices). The circuit can even draw power from the magnetic fields surrounding nearby power transformers—in an equipment rack, for instance—and two units can stereo-link wirelessly. Having only the one review unit, I didn’t notice at first that there was no Link jack...

The Mojo’q has an all-analog hand-wired signal path that doesn’t pass through any of the front-panel controls. Not only that, but it automatically adjusts input and output impedance to perfectly match whatever it’s connected to, without the need for transformers or I/O buffering of any kind. It can be placed anywhere in the signal chain and works with any balanced signal, automatically providing precise unity gain. Impressive!

Sounds like...?

The Mojo’q is such a beautiful-looking box, I couldn’t wait to hear what it sounded like. I started with all controls set to neutral or off and Classical selected, and found the effect quite subtle. This subtlety continued no matter how I adjusted the controls. I had to listen over and over to my various reference songs and session tracks to convince myself that the Mojo’q was doing anything at all... but eventually I managed it.

I wish it came with a manual, but Emperor insists that none is needed: you’re either pro enough to hear it or you aren’t. In the end, I had to describe the character as “straight wire with unity gain”—transparent, honest, and pure. My clients agreed, noting with some embarrassment that they couldn’t tell the difference between having it bypassed or not. At first, that is... eventually they got it, or said they did.

I’m guessing, but the Hype button seems to emphasize certain transients to give everything a tiny bit more “punch.” The Vibe, Mojo, and Attitude knobs need to be adjusted slowly and carefully to deliver the perfect combination of harmonic hairiness and improved soundstaging. I think.

Anyway, this is obviously not a sledgehammer-type tool for making radical changes. Its subtlety takes some learning... “ear training,” if you will. Emperor told me that many engineers can’t appreciate the Mojo’q; experience and education are apparently no substitute for that certain *je ne sais quoi* that you need to “get” it. However, it’s been a big hit in the audiophile community, where golden-eared devotees claim that everything that passes through it sounds indefinably better.

Something missing?

Anyone taking a critical look at the Mojo’q is bound to notice something missing (aside from any I/O or mic to go with the Talkback button—this feature hasn’t been implemented yet). This may be just me, but I like to see a light glowing somewhere—*anywhere*—to assure me the device is “on” and doing something. With this product, only your ears can tell you.

Is it worth it? Well, you can pay a lot less for boxes and plug-ins that do a lot more, but none do it with as much pure nerve as the Mojo’q. You owe it to yourself to hear the Emperor’s new audio processor. ➔

PRICES: \$1999.99

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Presta legal department says internal photo sent by accident. do not print! -mm

