

Bassic Review

Ashdown B-Social

By Chris Cavera

What comes to mind when you are asked to describe the job of a professional musician? Do you see someone who performs on stage, traveling from gig to gig and living out of a bus? In reality, most professional musicians spend the bulk of their time doing myriad things. They gig, but they also compose,



practice, jam, teach, record, produce, manage, write articles ... and some of them even have families and mortgages. Ashdown aims to cater to the needs of working musicians with the B-Social.

The Company

UK-based Ashdown Engineering has been making amps and pedals for bass players and acoustic guitarists since 1997. Their trademark analog VU meter has graced the faceplates of amps that have been used by some heavy hitters in the industry. Geezer Butler, Roger Waters, and the late John Entwistle and are among their endorsees. Their latest product, however, is built for the living room, instead of the stage, and can simplify some of the tasks that everyday musicians take on.

Multitasking

Calling the B-Social a “bass amp” is like calling a laptop a “word processor.” Yes you can plug a bass

into it, but there’s more. Much more! It’s a bass amp alright, but it’s also a full-range Bluetooth audio player, and a 2-channel USB audio interface. The idea is to have an all-in-one device that will also look nice sitting on a bookshelf in your home. As the name describes, it’s a hub for song-writing sessions, practicing, and other musical applications that don’t require window-rattling volume levels.

Sound

Plugging into the B-Social, I found the sound to be balanced and pleasant, but lacking overall in the lower range when utilizing the internal 5” drivers, only. Otherwise, it’s a very responsive tone with crisp attack and midrange clarity. Of course, you could always use the line out to drive a powered subwoofer, or other bass extension cabinet. There are dual instrument inputs that share standard EQ controls. There are passive and active inputs for both channels. Channel 1 has a built-in wireless receiver and a rechargeable “bug” is provided. When going wireless, I noticed that you lose some high end in exchange for the freedom of being untethered. I find this to be a common issue with wireless systems. There are also additional 8-ohm speaker outputs located on the back. Plugging in a pair of larger enclosures definitely upped the game in terms of overall volume and depth of tone. Designing a compact speaker system that can adequately reproduce good bass tone along with decent full-range response for music must have been no easy task. The dual concentric drivers are an exercise in compromise. The end result is a versatile system that produces bass tone and audio playback that sounds quite good, but is not outstanding in either application. I find the exposed speaker cones to be aesthetically pleasing, but also a little risky (though in truth, no more so than the average studio monitor).

Teachers Rejoice!

The private lesson studio is where the B-Social really shines. No more fumbling around with two bass amps and trying to find the right cables to connect a laptop or mp3 player to some ancient stereo system’s

aux input. The B-Social has you covered. Teacher and student plug into the same amp, and backing tracks connect via Bluetooth. Separate input levels allow you to balance all the signals perfectly without reaching around the room. The dual drivers provide a clear, full-range mix. This is something that private lesson instructors have needed for a long time. If you teach a lot of lessons, the B-Social is a godsend.

Idea Machine

Beyond lessons, the B-Social can be used to connect bandmates together for brainstorming sessions. If you have a small corner of your home dedicated to music-making, the B-Social can be a very useful addition. Guitar and bass can plug in together, and connect to a computer using the B-Social's built-in USB audio interface. A special 4-pole AppTek cable is also provided to connect with a mobile device running Agile's Ampkit app (which includes the Ashdown ABM simulator). This means you can simultaneously record a bass line on one channel and a simulated guitar tone on the other. The AppTek cable allows for more than just a simulated guitar tone. Using this cable to connect to your iOS device allows the use of hundreds of effects, amp simulators, etc.

The Scenario

The B-Social is placed in your living room. Your significant other likes the way it looks. It's also small, unassuming, and isn't a beer-soaked monolith with wires coming out of it. During the day, students come to your house for lessons. They don't have to bring an amp and they can Bluetooth tracks from their phone. When lessons are finished for the day and you're practicing solo, you can use the wireless, so there's one less cord for your toddler to trip over. Later on, your guitar player stops by and you hash out ideas for the next album and record them on his laptop. When it's time to relax,

other members of the family can use the B-Social to casually listen to their favorite tunes. All this takes place not in the basement or attic, but right there in your cozy living room. This might be the first bass amp aimed at musicians with families and limited space.

Closing Arguments

This product is innovative and therefore tricky to describe. It does exactly what it was meant to do. Is it the best-sounding bass rig on the planet? No, but it's pretty good. As a practice amp, it's outstanding. Is it the best Bluetooth music player on the planet? No, but again, it's pretty good. Does it compete with dedicated audio interfaces? No, but it works just fine. Is it the only product that attempts to accomplish all of these tasks and do so in a compact and attractive chassis? Indeed! The B-Social is a decent-sounding, feature-rich desktop or living-room amp that will declutter your music space, assist in casual songwriting sessions with bandmates, and be an invaluable tool for private instruction. Street pricing stateside is \$629, which includes the wireless transmitter. **BGM**

Manufacturer: Ashdown Engineering

Website: <http://ashdownmusic.com/products/1/Bass-Amplification/21/BSOCIAL/>

Model: B-Social

Output: 2x35 Watts

Speakers: Two, 5" (with whizzer cone)

Frequency Response: 60Hz-20kHz

High Instrument In: Two ¼"

Low Instrument In: Two ¼"

EQ: Bass +/-15dB @ 100Hz, Middle +/-15dB @ 660Hz, Treble +/-15dB @ 7kHz shelving, Bright

Speaker Out: 2x8 Ohms

Connections: ⅛" Line In, ⅛" Line Out, USB 2.0, AppTek, Bluetooth

Dimensions HxWxD: 10" x 14.5" x 8"

Weight: 16.7lbs

Price: \$629.99

