

ACOUSTIC
GUITAR

Mighty Jones

Eight acoustic amplifiers reviewed

By Teja Gerken



Photos by Tue Nam Ton

Amps Reviewed

AER Alpha, Fred Coyner Musical Instruments, (800) 799-9733, www.aer-amps.de.

Ashdown Acoustic Radiator 1, HHB Communications USA, (805) 579-6490, www.ashdownmusic.co.uk.

Crate CA112D, St. Louis Music, (800) 738-7563, www.crateamps.com.

Fender Acoustasonic 30, Fender Musical Instruments Corp., (480) 596-9690, www.fender.com.

Genz Benz Shenandoah 85, Genz Benz Enclosures, (480) 941-0705, www.genzbenz.com.

Peavey Ecoustic 110 EFX, Peavey Electronics Corp., (601) 483-5365, www.peavey.com.

Tech 21 Bronzewood 60, Tech 21, (973) 777-6996, www.tech21nyc.com.

Ultrasound Pro 200, Ultrasound Amplifiers, (888) 308-1557, www.ultrasoundamps.com.



If you're planning to play acoustic guitar in a loud band or perform at a venue that requires a volume boost and you want to maintain the acoustic sound of your guitar, it may be time to invest in an acoustic amplifier. While it is possible to use that Fender or Marshall you use with your electric guitar, electric guitar amps are designed to color the guitar's sound and create their own distinctive voice. Acoustic amps, on the other hand, are built to create a transparent sound that is close to the actual sound of your instrument. Acoustic amps feature a full-range speaker system, which usually includes a main speaker and a high-frequency tweeter; enough power to avoid overdriving the circuitry; and EQ that complements the natural sound of a fine acoustic instrument. Most also feature a variety of unique goodies that enhance their practicality, such as notch filters for controlling feedback, XLR inputs for using vocal or external instrument mics, and DI outputs.

When shopping for an acoustic amp, you need to be clear about how you're going to use it. If you only need a little boost for playing a coffee shop or a wedding reception, a small amp that's easy to carry is probably what you're looking for. On the other hand, if you need to compete with a loud drummer or intend to use the amp as a self-contained PA, you'll probably want to look at some more powerful options. Think about how many input channels you need and whether you're likely to connect other equipment, such as a vocal mic or a drum machine. If you already have an elaborate preamp, it won't matter much if the amp doesn't offer much EQ, a DI output, or an effects loop, but if you don't, then getting a full-featured amp may be a good idea.

For this article, we examined eight acoustic amps (introduced since our last roundup in October 1999) that vary widely in features, size, and price. The reviewers included myself, *Acoustic Guitar* editors Andrew DuBrock and Scott Nygaard, and northern California folk duo Solid Air (www.globerecords.com/solidair), which features guitarist/vocalist Allegra Broughton and bassist Sam Page. We tested the amps using a Taylor 314-K steel-string equipped with a Fishman Acoustic Matrix pickup, a Taylor NS52ce nylon-string with a Fishman Prefix Blend, a Lowden O-10 steel-string with an L.R. Baggs Dual Source, a Gibson L-200 steel-string with a Sunrise soundhole pickup (using a TC Electronic Booster Plus as a preamp), and a Steve Andersen Concert steel-string with a Fishman Rare Earth



RAY LARSEN

It didn't take much tweaking to get the AER Alpha to produce an accurate sound.

Blend. We took turns playing through each amp and also listened to them accompanied by Page playing his Azola upright electric bass through an SWR Baby Blue amp. Broughton and DuBrock tested the amps' mic channels by singing through a Shure SM58 mic. The amps that featured DI outputs were run through a Mackie 32-8 mixing board driving a pair of powered JBL EON 15 speakers, and we checked the effects loops with an Alesis Nanoverb effects processor.

In addition to the acoustic amps we reviewed, there are several other new models available as well as many excellent, older models. Check out some of their features and highlights in "More Acoustic Amps" on page 74.

AER Alpha

\$899. Two-year warranty. 40 watts, one eight-inch twin-cone speaker, two channels, 14.3 pounds.



The Alpha's minimal but effective controls.

German-made AER amplifiers are known for producing amazing sound in small packages. At about ten inches cubed, the tiny Alpha is now the most portable (and least expensive) product in the AER line. The amp features two inputs (a combination quarter-inch/XLR on channel one and a quarter-inch on channel two), 24 volts of phantom power, a three-band EQ and digital reverb (that works on both channels), an XLR DI out (preverb), a quarter-inch line out (postverb), an effects loop, and a connection for a footswitch that controls the internal reverb and externally patched-in processors. Additional features include a headphone jack, a line/mic selector switch on channel one, a ten-dB pad and contour (a preset mid cut and treble boost) on channel two, and an LED that indicates preamp clipping. A beefy, recessed handle (which is very convenient if you're planning to stack other equipment on top of the unit) completes the AER's professional appearance.

The volume and tone the Alpha produced were phenomenal. With the exception of some mild limiting at its upper volume levels, the amp was very transparent, lending a minimal amount of coloration to the pickups' tones. Guitars with a very bright tone sounded more brittle through the AER than they did with some of the inherently warmer-sounding



Warm and compact: Ashdown Acoustic Radiator 1.

amps, but all of the guitars were accurately amplified. The Taylor nylon-string sounded spectacular, making the Alpha an excellent choice for classical players. The unit's reverb control is basic, but it functions well and would be adequate for most situations. The amp could benefit from more effective EQ. The three bands were limited in their tone-shaping capabilities, particularly the mid control, which had little effect on the sound. Plugging a vocal mic into channel one while playing guitar through channel two indicated that the Alpha would be great as a miniature PA. The vocal and guitar were both remarkably clear, and there was plenty of volume for a typical coffeehouse or similar gig.

Ashdown Acoustic Radiator 1

\$899. Five-year warranty. 100 watts, one eight-inch speaker with dual tweeter array, two channels, 24.5 pounds.

Ashdown Engineering is only five years old, but the company's amps, which combine British engineering and retro looks, have already made a splash in the electric bass world. Ashdown offers two acoustic guitar amps, and we test-drove the smaller Acoustic Radiator 1.

Although it's relatively heavy for its size, the Radiator 1's very compact dimensions of about 15 by 13 by 8 inches make it ultraportable. The amp's most distinctive feature is its vertically arranged front panel, which is situated to the right of the metal speaker grill. The panel includes controls for two channels: quarter-inch inputs for channels one and two, an XLR input (with switchable phantom power) for channel two, and individual gain, bass, and treble controls for each channel. Channel one also includes a notch filter and push-buttons that allow you to set the amp for active or passive pickups, reverse the phase, or activate a "shape" function that uses a preset "smile curve" EQ with a bass and treble boost and mid cut. There's also a master volume control, a master control for the unit's digital reverb, and more push-button controls that allow you to choose between long or short and "hall" or "plate" reverb settings.

The Ashdown produced a great, warm sound and plenty of volume for playing at coffeeshops or with an acoustic band. We found the vertical control panel to be a little difficult to negotiate when the amp was placed on the floor, and we heard a slight rattle we were unable to pinpoint when the amp was pushed toward its volume limits. Although the available EQ is minimal, we found it to be very handy for basic sound shaping, and the preset shape button did a remarkable job of removing the midrange hump present in some acoustic guitars. The vocal mic sounded good through the Ashdown as well.

Crate CA112D

\$969.99. Five-year transferable warranty on amplifier, two years on speakers. 125 watts, one 12-inch speaker, one high-frequency tweeter, three channels, 44 pounds. The CA112D is the latest addition to Crate's established line of acoustic amps. This amp is similar to the CA125D, but it features a single 12-inch speaker rather than two eight-inch drivers, potentially providing greater punch and lower bass frequencies than the CA125D. The CA112D is sizable and considerably hefty, but it offers lots of power and a wide range of features.

Even though the Crate's front panel is busy, its layout is logical. The primary emphasis is on the instrument channel, which includes a gain control, its own EQ (low, frequency-selectable mids, and high), a notch filter, a passive/active switch (to accommodate both types of pickups), and a knob for adjusting the amount of signal sent to built-in or patched-in effects. There are also controls for the depth and rate of the unit's chorus effect, which is only applicable to the instrument channel. Channels two and three (labeled vocal/mic and aux) are identical to one another except that channel two includes an XLR input with 24 volts of phantom power. Gain and reverb/effects send are the only controls available on channels two and three. The front panel also features a master section, which includes controls for 16 digital reverbs and delays, a master return for the effects loop, a five-band graphic EQ, master volume, and power switch. On the back panel, there are controls that define how much tweeter signal gets mixed in with the main speaker and how much signal comes out of the balanced DI output (available with XLR and TRS quarter-inch jacks). There are also send and return jacks for the effects loop and a jack for connecting a supplied foot-switch, which turns the amp's built-in reverb and chorus on and off.



The loud, full-toned Crate CA112D features extensive but logical control panels.



It took very little tweaking to get excellent sound—fat, dynamic, and natural—from all our test guitars. The CA112D had volume to spare and would work well with a loud band. The tone from the vocal signal was less impressive—its lack of clarity would benefit from a dedicated EQ—and the amp’s tilt-back cabinet design was slightly wobbly on carpeted floors. The effects offered were great—useful for adding anything from a touch of high-quality reverb to radical chorus or delay to the overall tone.

Fender Acoustasonic 30

\$449.99. Five-year transferable warranty. 30 watts, one eight-inch speaker, one high-frequency tweeter, two channels, 35 pounds. This small, 30-watt unit is the entry-level



The Acoustasonic 30 can be tilted back like a stage monitor.

acoustic amp in Fender’s Acoustasonic line. Except for its unusual wedge shape, which allows it to be tilted back like a stage monitor (but also increases its bulk), the Acoustasonic 30 looks like a classic Fender amp. The instrument channel features a quarter-inch input as well as standard volume, treble, mid, and bass controls. In addition, there is a “string dynamics” and chorus control, as well as small push-buttons for activating the chorus and the amp’s overall reverb. Channel two consists of an XLR mic input (with 15 volts of phantom power) and controls for volume, treble, and bass. At the end of the front panel’s row of knobs is a lone reverb control (affecting both channels), a phase-reversal button, jacks for an optional footswitch (to activate the chorus effect), a quarter-inch line out, and the power switch.

The Acoustasonic 30 is extremely easy to use but offers limited volume. We were

able to dial in natural-sounding tones at low volumes, but the more we cranked it up, the more the amp began saturating the tone. This was particularly evident in the vocal channel, which was overdriven by the vocal mic before the volume was even halfway up. The string dynamics function alleviated some of the harshness from under-saddle pickups, and the amp’s chorus fattened the tone up nicely. The Acoustasonic 30 would work best as a practice amp or stage monitor.

Genz Benz Shenandoah 85

\$749.50. Three-year warranty. 85 watts, one 12-inch speaker, one high-frequency compression tweeter, two channels, 47 pounds.

Genz Benz built its reputation on bass guitar amplifiers and is relatively new in the field of acoustic guitar amps. The Shenandoah 85 looks more like a PA cabinet than a typical guitar amp, except that it has knobs. The unit’s easy-to-understand front panel controls two identical channels, each equipped with quarter-inch and XLR inputs (the XLR inputs have 13.6 volts of phantom power), which can be used simultaneously if necessary. There are also controls for gain, effects level, and a three-band EQ (with sweepable mids). The master section is made up of a master volume control and a selector and level control for the on-board, 24-bit Alesis effects processor. The back of the Shenandoah 85 is home to *three* DI outputs, each available with XLR and quarter-inch connectors. With the ability to tap each channel individually (pre-EQ) or both channels together (post-EQ), this design allows great flexibility in choosing what kind of signal to send to the PA. The back panel also hosts jacks for an effects loop, a footswitch (to turn the internal effects

and the loop on or off), and extension speakers. Switches for ground lift and to choose 115- or 230-volt operation complete the picture. Other features worth mentioning are a foldout handle on the *bottom* of the unit, which allows the amp to be tilted up for use as a monitor, and a recessed pole mount.



The Shenandoah 85 set the standard for full-range sound.

The Shenandoah set the standard for full-range sound. With the EQ set flat, it immediately presented a rich sound with an impressive low end, musical highs, and no inappropriate peaks. When we did kick in the EQ, we found it to be equally effective for solving problems and for tweaking guitar tone. The sound and EQ-ability transferred to use with a vocal mic, making this amp our singers’ favorite. There were no surprises with the built-in effects, which are standard Alesis fare. This was also one of the loudest amps we checked out, with enough power to fill any small- to medium-size venue and to compete with electric instruments. For even more volume, Genz Benz offers a matching powered extension speaker.



Three direct outs grace the Shenandoah’s back panel.

Peavey Ecoustic 110 EFX

\$499.99. Five-year warranty. Bi-amped with 30 watts to low frequencies, ten watts to highs. One ten-inch coaxial speaker, two channels, 32.5 pounds.

The 110 EFX is the smaller of the two amps in Peavey's new Ecoustic line, which was introduced at last year's summer NAMM show. The larger Ecoustic 112 EFX features a 12-inch speaker and 125 watts of power. The Ecoustic's look is unique thanks to a slightly wedged shape, a golden anodized front panel, and a sparse selection of knobs (using graphic sliders rather than the more common rotary buttons for the tone controls). Channel one has a quarter-inch input, a phase-reversal switch, volume control, and four-band EQ. Channel two repeats this arrangement, adding an XLR input (with 15 volts of phantom power) and eliminating the phase switch. The Ecoustic features four independent digital effects processors. Each channel has a processor for various combinations of reverb and delay, and channel one adds a modulation processor with a doubler, phaser, chorus, and rotary speaker simulator (one effect is available at a time). Channel two adds a single preset chorus option. The amp also features Peavey's proprietary Freq Out anti-feedback function, which is designed to work automatically. The back panel houses only a pair of jacks (labeled "power amp in" and "power amp out") for the effects loop, which can also be used as a line out



The Ecoustic 110 EFX features four effects processors.



The Bronzewood 60 combines a vintage feel with great tones.

or line-level input, and a special eight-pin socket for an optional footswitch (which can recall three preset effect combinations and mute the overall signal).

Considering its relatively large size, the Ecoustic didn't produce a lot of volume, but it did stay fairly clean even with the volume all the way up. Quite a bit of EQ was necessary to create a natural sound, and cranking the EQ resulted in some hiss. The mic channel worked OK but had a boxy quality until it was heavily EQ'd. The lack of a master volume control also means that it is necessary to alter both channels' levels if an overall change is required.

The Ecoustic's effects are its best features. One of our favorites was a rich chorus sound that worked particularly well on guitars equipped with magnetic pickups. The amp's feedback reduction function was also impressive. Without altering the basic sound of the amp, it quickly showed offensive frequencies the door.

Tech 21 Bronzewood 60

\$645. One-year warranty. 60 watts, one 12-inch speaker, one high-frequency horn, two channels, 38 pounds.

Famous for its compact SansAmp amp simulators, Tech 21 is also known among acoustic guitarists for the SansAmp Acoustic DI preamp. The company's Bronzewood 60 amplifier is not brand-new (it was introduced in 1999), but it was unavailable at the time of our last review, so we chose to include it this time around.

Although Tech 21 refers to the Bronzewood 60 as "compact," its dimensions are actually on the large side for an acoustic amp. About the size of a tweed Fender Deluxe, the unit conveys a vintage

feel with its array of top-mounted "chicken-head" knobs, open-back design, and faux alligator skin covering. The Bronzewood's control panel is arranged in two rows. There's a quarter-inch input and preamp and tone sections for channel one. Preamp features control a built-in compressor, gain (labeled "preamp"), and a notch filter, along with on/off buttons and a phase switch. The tone section includes two knobs to operate the semi-parametric midrange and controls for low, high, and blend. Blend does not allow you to mix the two channels but can be used to dial in the desired amount of Tech 21's own tube/microphone simulation circuitry. At the end of this line of controls is the master section, which consists of two dials for reverb and volume. Channel two starts out with an XLR input (with optional 24-volt phantom power), followed by controls for gain; low, mid, and high EQ; reverb mix (which blends the amount of reverb between the two channels); and level. The amp's back is home to headphone and extension speaker jacks and an XLR DI output featuring SansAmp circuitry, a ground lift, an effects loop, and a footswitch jack (which turns the reverb on and off).

At first glance, we found the layout of the Bronzewood's controls confusing. Channel one's controls begin with compression, for example, while channel two's start with gain. And it seemed odd to place the mid controls before low and high in the guitar channel. Once we sorted out what was where, we were able to dial in some pretty happening tones. The amp sounded best at moderate volume levels and seemed to lose its focus and become somewhat shrill as we turned it up. The spring reverb didn't sound as smooth as more modern digital designs, but the amp's compressor would come in handy for players with an aggressive strumming style. The SansAmp function removed a certain amount of piezo pickup quack, although the effect was subtle. We were also impressed by the sound of our SM58 run through the mic channel.

Ultrasound Pro 200

\$1,200. Five-year transferable warranty. 200 watts, two eight-inch speakers, two high-frequency horns, two channels, 47 pounds.

Ultrasound received much acclaim for its compact AG-50 series of amps, and it's now following up with the much more powerful Pro 200. Rated at 200 watts and featuring two channels with independent effects processors as well as a variety of output options, the Pro 200 is what most would call full-featured. Located on the amp's top, the control panel is clearly laid out, and the settings are easy to see. Channel one features a quarter-inch input, volume (gain), bass, treble, and notch-filter controls (with separate on/off switch), a shape switch (which cuts mids while boosting bass and treble), and level and mode selectors for the digital effects (which include 16 programs—a variety of reverbs, choruses, and delays). Channel two includes an XLR input, a quarter-inch auxiliary input, and volume controls for both. There is also a three-band EQ and the same effects controls as channel one. At



Ultrasound's controls are clean, logical, and effective.



RAY LARSEN

The Pro 200 added warmth to bright guitars.

the end of the row of knobs is a dial selecting how much of the unit's high-frequency horn is added to the speaker signal and a master volume control. The back of the amp features three separate DI outputs (each with XLR and quarter-inch connectors) with the ability to tap into each individual channel or mix the two. There are also quarter-inch jacks for a line out and a line in, which can be used to connect an Ultrasound powered extension cabinet. Curiously, there is no effects loop, but we were able to patch in a

Nanoverb by taking one of the DI signals as a send and routing the effect's output into channel two's auxiliary input.

The Pro 200 tended to be on the bassy side, and a more effective EQ—particularly on the guitar channel—would have been useful. Although the amp was certainly loud, we all expected more volume considering its high wattage. It wasn't quite as transparent as some of the smaller Ultrasound amps we've tested in the past, but its tone was nice and warm, and it sounded best when paired with a relatively bright-sounding guitar or pickup.

Lots of Options

Acoustic amps have come a long way since they were introduced a decade or so ago. Different guitars, pickups, and playing styles result in varied responses from all of these amps, so it's essential to bring your rig to the music store and try out some amps for yourself. Beware of wattage ratings. Higher numbers do not always mean more volume potential. Based on the guitars and pickups we used and our own playing styles, we identified a few standouts in this batch of amps. Among the bigger amps we reviewed, the Crate CA112D and Genz Benz Shenandoah 85 seemed to offer the most raw power and great overall sound. Either one of them would work well as a substitute for a PA. In the smaller size range, the AER Alpha and Ashdown Acoustic Radiator 1 were particularly impressive and sure to please players who need excellent sound but like to travel light. ■



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More Acoustic Amps

In addition to the Alpha, AER offers several larger acoustic amps. The Compact 60 (\$999) is only slightly bigger than the Alpha but provides a significant boost in power. It offers 60 watts of power and two full-featured channels with individual tone controls. For players on the go, there's the Compact Mobile (\$1,299), which runs on rechargeable batteries. But the best-known AER is probably the AcoustiCube IIa (\$2,299), with 120 watts of power, a full array of digital effects, and myriad connections (including an optional TRS stereo input).

Ashdown Engineering's Acoustic Radiator 2 (\$1,499) is a larger version of the Acoustic Radiator 1. It features 160 watts of power and more extensive EQ and effects controls than the Acoustic Radiator 1.

The German-made Behringer Ultracoustic ACX1000 (\$599.99, www.behringer.com), with 120 watts of stereo power and advanced MIDI capabilities, should appeal to those who work with a lot of outboard gear.

Carvin's AG100D (\$449.99, www.carvin.com) has long been a favorite among players looking for a mini-PA in a cabinet. With a 12-inch speaker, 100 watts of power, and three independent channels, the AG100D is a flexible unit that can be further expanded with the optional 112AG extension speaker (\$199.99).

Crate offers acoustic amplification in smaller packages than the CA112D we reviewed. The 30-watt CA30 (\$359.99 with spring reverb, \$399.99 with digital effects) is a good choice for practice and low-volume gigs. Doubling the CA30's power, the CA60 (\$629.99 with spring reverb, \$729.99 with digital effects) offers 60 watts of power, twin 6.5-inch speakers, and two channels. And the CA125D (\$969.99), Crate's original acoustic amp, features the same amplifier section as the CA112D but with a different set of speakers.

If you like to assemble your amp from various independent components (preamps, power amps, effects, etc.), Daedalus cabinets are worth checking out (www.daedalusmusic.com). Featuring handmade enclosures and high-quality speakers, they're ready to accept any rack-mounted components you choose.

Epiphone (www.epiphone.com) offers three inexpensive acoustic amps. The Acoustic Regent 30 (\$315) features 30 watts of power and four five-inch speakers. The larger Acoustic Regent 220 (\$519) and 230 (\$615) have twice the power, pumped through somewhat unusual speaker configurations: one eight-inch and two five-inch speakers on the 220, and one ten-inch combined with four five-inch speakers on the 230, giving the latter a deeper bass response.

Fender's Acoustasonic Jr. (\$619.99), with two 40-watt channels and typical Fender features, such as tilt-back legs and stereo chorus, has become very popular since it was introduced in 1997. The hefty Acoustasonic SFX (\$929.99) features two 80-watt channels and a unique simulated stereo feature that orients one speaker forward and another one sideways.

In addition to the Shenandoah 85, Genz Benz offers the scaled-down, 35-watt Shenandoah Jr. (\$479.50), which features a ten-inch speaker and two channels with minimal controls. The recently introduced Shenandoah Stereo Deluxe 200 (\$1,399.50) provides enough volume to rock an arena, with 200 watts of stereo power and two 12-inch speakers.

Ibanez' affordable TA25 Troubadour (\$299.99, www.ibanez.com) is a great practice amp that offers basic features, such as two

channels and an XLR input. The larger TA225C Troubadour (\$529.99), with two 25-watt channels, essentially places two of the smaller amps into one package.

British amplifier manufacturer Laney (www.laneyusa.com) makes two acoustic amps. The smaller LA30C (\$289.99) offers 30 watts of power, an eight-inch speaker, and built-in chorus. The larger LA65C (\$399.99) has 65 watts of power and more extensive EQ.

Peavey's Ecooustic 112 EFX (\$799.99) is big brother to the more compact unit we reviewed, with 125 watts of power, an expanded five-band EQ, master volume, and an added auxiliary channel. Many acoustic guitarists have also found Peavey's line of keyboard amps to be a good match for their instruments. The three-channel KB/A 50 (\$369.99) lacks some acoustic guitar-specific features such as effects and a notch filter, but it's an economical option for those who already have control over these parameters via preamps or outboard gear.

Designed with input from fingerpicker Doyle Dykes, Rivera's Sedona amps (www.rivera.com) feature tube circuitry. Available in 55-watt (\$1,995) and 100-watt (\$2,495) versions, the Sedonas are unique in that they include a separate channel for electric guitars. A line of extension cabinets is available for greater sound dispersion.

Rocktron's Rampage Acoustic (\$579, www.rocktron.com) offers 60 watts of power through a single ten-inch speaker. Two identical channels feature phantom-powered XLR as well as quarter-inch inputs and extensive EQ control.

Roland's AC-100 (\$1,195, www.rolandus.com) brings the company's legendary chorus sound to a powerful acoustic amp. The unit features 100 watts of power, one 12-inch and two five-inch speakers, and two channels.

SWR's California Blonde acoustic amp (\$1,099, www.swrsound.com) offers lots of power—120 watts—through a 12-inch speaker and is one of very few amps to feature a stereo TRS input with phantom power for pickup/internal mic combinations. At a more basic level, SWR's Strawberry Blonde (\$699) has a single channel, 80 watts of power, and more compact dimensions. The Blonde on Blonde (\$699) powered extension can be used to augment either unit.

Trace Elliot's TA 100R (\$1,799, www.traceelliot.com), one of the first dedicated acoustic amps available, has an ultraclean sound, digital effects, and features such as a phantom-powered XLR input and a notch filter. The company's smaller TA 50R (\$1,249) offers the same sound and features in an even more portable package.

Ultrasound's AG-50DS2 (starting at \$480) has become a favorite among players looking for a compromise between power and portability. Ultrasound also offers the smaller AG-30 (\$180) and the much larger AG-100DS2 (\$680). All the model numbers refer to the units' wattage rating. Powered extensions matching the 50- and 100-watt amps are also available.

Players who need an amp that runs on rechargeable batteries will want to check out Walker Labs' SoundTrek Jr. (\$599, www.walker-labs.com). With 30 watts of power and two inputs, the unit can serve as an ultraportable PA.

Finally, Canada's Yorkville (www.yorkville.com) makes acoustic amps in three sizes. The AM50 (\$399) offers 50 watts of power through a single eight-inch speaker, the AM100 (\$549) drives two 6.5-inch speakers with 100 watts, and the AM150 (\$629) features 150 watts of power and two eight-inch speakers.