

Walk Together, Rock Together: A Talk with Kevin Seconds, Ian MacKaye & Don Zientara

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Cloud Microphones Cloudlifter X

The mic activator transformed!



REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Since its introduction in 2009, the nearly ubiquitous Cloudlifter has arguably become to inline microphone signal boosters what Kleenex is to tissues. This is borne out by the fact that I am told the Cloud has produced and sold more than 350,000 channels of Cloudlifter in the past 14 years. So what does Cloud do to make its well-loved mic activator even more lofty? Transform it and add some “X” factor in the form of the new Cloudlifter X.

In the Clouds

We first looked at the inaugural (18–20dB) 2-channel Cloudlifter in June 2010. Since then, the line has expanded to include the single-channel and still most popular CL-1, the 2-channel CL-2 and the 4-channel rack mount CL-4 (reviewed December 2015). Each CL offering features a 4-FET amplifier circuit that adds up to 25dB of ultra-clean gain at a fixed 3kΩ load.

In December 2012, I reviewed the variable impedance Cloudlifter-Z that offered a gain boost of +12 or +25dB and a variable high-pass filter. The instrument-focused Cloudlifter Zi followed in December 2017.

The Cloudlifter X

The just released Cloudlifter X adds a purpose-designed nickel wound CineMag transformer to the proceedings with a choice of +36dB of gain (now the loudest voice in the “clouds”). This can also be attenuated down to +12dB at the touch of a button. Still dressed in Cloud blue, the new model measures 4.25" L x 2.38" W x 2" T—about a third bigger than the CL-1.

More Power

As with all models in the line, the Cloudlifter X uses +48V phantom power

to increase the signal of low output, passive ribbon and dynamic microphones as cleanly and transparently as possible. This allows your microphone pre-amp and interface to work less at lower input levels, lowering the overall noise floor. It can also boost the level of your favorite old-school, low-output tube mic because, while the unit is phantom powered, it does not pass phantom power.

Transformed

Since its inception the Cloudlifter “thing” has been clean, uncolored and loud, so you might be curious about the new transformer’s purpose—especially since we are often told in the audio world that transformers, like tubes, add color and vibe. But just as a well-designed tube circuits can be clean, open and opulent sounding, a well-chosen and implemented transformer can keep things clean and clear, and even offer a more linear phase response.

Bigger but Not More Colorful

The Cloudlifter X does offer a slightly different sonic response than the CL-1. I use the word response in place of words like “sound” or “color” on purpose, as the Cloudlifter X and its siblings sound incredibly similar.

What the X brings to the table is a touch bigger overall presence that, for lack of a better word, just gives you a bit “more”—bigger lows, more prominent mids and better highs, but all without sounding like anything was added.

Compared to other transformer-based mic boosters (which offer great sonic options of their own), I was impressed that the Cloudlifter X did not constrain or reign in the low-end, as can happen in some other boxes.

Hit It!

The beauty of a transformer is that it can and will harmonically saturate in what we would call a “musical way” when fed with a loud signal (presumably why the Cloudlifter X has an attenuation switch). Bold singers, punchy horns, crackling snare drums, loud guitar amps and more can benefit from a beautiful hint of upper midrange saturation when hitting the transformer hard.

X Marks the Spot

The Cloudlifter X is an excellent addition to the Cloud family. I like that it adds its own new thing that works seamlessly alongside its brethren rather than being a good/better/best scenario. Simply choose the Cloudlifter with the gain level, features and price point that suit your needs.

I will say that the Cloudlifter X is my current favorite of the bunch and will see a lot of use in my upcoming sessions. Have we mentioned that it works great with a Shure SM7B? ➡

Price: \$229
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