



## Krell Showcase Processor

I feel for the companies that make high-end preamp/processors. All of these products incorporate excellent electronic components, and almost all of them offer the same surround-sound technologies: Dolby Digital, DTS, THX, and the many variants thereof. How, then, does a product designer gain an edge over his competitors?



The front panel includes an infrared emitter that "teaches" control codes to programmable remotes. *(Click image to enlarge)*

Many have not, but now Krell has, thanks to the audio equalizer incorporated in the company's new Showcase surround-sound preamp/processor. This equalizer compares to conventional tone controls in the way that a full machine shop compares to a Leatherman. If your center speaker has an annoying boost in the upper midrange, the Showcase can fix it. If your room makes the bass boom, the Showcase can fix it. If you find your DVDs sound a little shrill, the Showcase can fix that, too.

Built-in equalizers are not new; some surround-sound receivers include them. They are still rare in high-end home theater components, though; that rarity gives the Showcase an edge over many of its competitors.

Balanced XLR jacks on the rear panel provide a professional-style connection to high-end amplifiers and CD players. *(Click image to enlarge)*



The equalizer offers three filters, which can be used in combination. They can be set the same for all channels, or different for each channel. The filter choices include high-pass (bass cut), low-pass (treble cut), bass and treble shelving (less drastic than a typical treble or bass control), notch (to cut a specific frequency, which is great for taming booming bass), and peaking (like notch filtering, but it can cut or boost, and the level is adjustable). The frequency at which the controls work, the amount of change they introduce, and the shape of the notch and peaking filters are all variable. The Showcase also offers four equalizer memories; you could set up one for movies, one for music, etc.

Be careful, though. Treat the Showcase's equalizer like an Indy car, because both have enough power to get you into trouble. If you can state—right now, without looking it up—how many octaves the human ear can hear, then you probably know enough to handle this equalizer. If you cannot, leave it to your installer. I recommend against setting the equalizer by ear; to do it correctly, you or your installer should use a device called a real-time analyzer, which shows which frequencies need cutting and which need boosting. Unlike an Indy car, though, the Showcase has a factory preset function that will bring the equalizer immediately back to factory settings (or to the settings your installer entered), so

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mistakes are temporary.

Other than the equalizer, the Showcase deviates little from the norm. It offers all of the surround-sound technologies you need, in either the standard 5.1-channel setup (three speakers up front, two in back, and a subwoofer), or a full 7.1-channel system with two extra surround speakers in back.

The Showcase offers inputs for any consumer audio or video source, including high-definition TV, any DVD player, SACD and DVD-Audio, even humble VHS. All that is lacking is a phono input for a record player, but an external phono preamp could easily fix that. In addition to the usual RCA unbalanced audio outputs, there is a full set of XLR balanced outputs, for a professional-style connection to high-end amplifiers.

Krell designed the Showcase pre/pro with custom installation in mind. It has trigger outputs and a trigger input, so the Showcase can turn other gear on and off automatically, and other gear can turn the Showcase on and off, too. An RS-232 input makes for easy mating with a touchscreen controller like those from AMX and Crestron, and Krell provides RS-232 control codes for all of the Showcase's functions, which many pre/pros do not.

Two sometimes-important features are absent. First is a second-zone output; some pre/pros include this output to let you listen to, say, a CD in the bedroom while someone is watching a DVD in the home theater. Second is an AM/FM tuner. If you want to risk running Dr. Laura through your system, though, the Showcase has an audio input for a separate AM/FM tuner.



Many will consider the "credit card" remote a throwaway, but its metal chassis gives it a surprisingly gratifying feel. *(Click image to enlarge)*

The Showcase's remote looks like a large version of the flimsy "credit card" remotes that come with some boom boxes and shelf systems. Yet it is solid and weighty, because the back is made of metal. You could call it the

Janeane Garofalo of remotes—sort of sexy, but at the same time, sort of not. Obviously, Krell expects most of its customers to use their own, high-end touchscreen remote control.

Likewise, the Showcase's wealth of advanced features and fine-tuning options make it most suitable for situations where it will be installed by a pro or a knowledgeable hobbyist. Some setup is required just to get picture and sound; you or your installer must "tell" the Showcase which audio and video inputs to use for each device in your system.

The Showcase sounds exceptionally clear and crisp; I would call it more deliberate and neutral-sounding than the warm-and-cozy Sunfire Theater Grand III reviewed in this issue. These differences are subtle; what is not subtle is the effect of the equalizer. With the equalizer set correctly, the sound of your system will improve dramatically. I guarantee you will hear the difference. I guarantee your grandmother will hear the difference. I was able to perform astounding feats with the equalizer. For example, I tweaked some ceiling speakers to near-perfection, despite the fact that they were mounted in the drop ceiling of an eccentrically shaped, glass-walled conference room.

I am amazed that Krell has packed so much technology into this new pre/pro, while upgrading the styling and cutting the price. With skilled installation and setup, the Showcase will make your system sound far, far better than you have ever heard it sound before.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Surround-sound preamp/processor. Decodes surround sound, controls volume, routes audio and video from source devices (DVD player, satellite receiver, etc.)

to TV, amplifiers, and speakers.

**DIMENSIONS**

5.7 x 17.3 x 16.5 inches (hwd)

**CONNECTIONS**

Accommodates 10 A/V sources. 8 of these can be assigned to any of the following inputs: 3 high-bandwidth component video, 4 S-video, 4 composite video, 4 optical digital audio, 4 coaxial digital audio, 1 XLR balanced analog audio, 7 RCA unbalanced analog audio, 7.1-channel analog audio. Dedicated RCA analog audio inputs and outputs for VCR and audio tape deck. XLR and RCA outputs for 7.1 channels. Coaxial digital audio output. RS-232 input. 4 12VDC trigger outputs to control lighting, motorized screen, etc. 1 12VDC trigger input. 1 RC-5 remote control input.

**SURROUND MODES**

Dolby Digital EX and Pro Logic II, DTS ES-Discrete/Matrix and Neo:6, THX Surround EX (Ultra-certified), various proprietary Krell surround modes.

**PRICE/CONTACT**

PRICE: \$4,000

CONTACT: 203-799-9954

[www.krellonline.com](http://www.krellonline.com)