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Fungi, the traditional music of the British Virgin Islands, is named after a local cornmeal dish often involving okra.

Although an integral part of contemporary BVI culture, Fungi is virtually unknown outside of the islands themselves. Until I started doing the research for this review, I was totally unaware that the BVI — better known for tourism and financial services — had anything to do with the manufacture of guitar amplifiers (valve or otherwise), and it was something of a surprise to find that the company behind the all-valve Bugera brand, Red Chip Ltd, is registered there.

However, my burgeoning fantasy of a factory visit to the Caribbean shattered when I discovered that the Bugera 6260 is, in reality, built in China; that Behringer have been appointed by Red Chip Ltd as their exclusive worldwide distributor; and that the brand name actually belongs to Behringer.

Behringer are a major manufacturer of audio and lighting products, all at pretty attractive price points, and included in that wide range are a goodly number of guitar amplifiers. Although they do produce a couple of valve guitar combo amplifiers, these are much lower wattage affairs, designed for a very different target customer and definitely not for the hard and heavy rock, death metal musicians that the Bugera 6260 seems destined to attract.

Construction

Lifting the 6260 out from its carton shouldn't be undertaken without bended knees, as at 21.5kg this is a pretty hefty amplifier. The bulk

Bugera 6260 120W valve amplifier head

Behringer's range of amplifiers has been given a new injection of volume, with the arrival of this 'boutique-style' amp head, and with 120 Watts available, it should satisfy even the most power-hungry guitarist.



of the weight results from the mass of metal that is physically necessary in mains and output transformers that have been designed to cope with the demands of 120W of valve amplification.

First impressions continue to be pretty good, as the black PVC-Tolexed cabinet with its chrome corner protectors, silver plastic faceplate with black chicken-head knobs, and front and back black metal grilles, is pretty handsome in a macho kind of way. Through the grille mesh, the 6260's preamp and power amp valves, flanked by its two massive mains and output transformers, are clearly visible. Bugera describe the 6260 as being a "boutique-style" amplifier and from a distance it certainly looks the part, although the cabinet isn't quite up to the standard you'd expect from a true boutique amplifier at three or four times the price.

The Bugera 6260 is a well-built amplifier internally, with neat and tidy printed circuit boards and wiring. Unlike true boutique amplifiers, it doesn't have point-to-point, hand-wired circuitry, but in terms of its basic construction at least, the 6260 follows normal practice for most modern volume production guitar amplifiers.

Incidentally, I hope that the Bugera 6260 that I received was a review model rushed to me from Germany by Behringer, since the supplied IEC mains lead was an illegal European 220V Shuko version and not a legal three-pin UK one. If I'd tried to use that Shuko lead without an adaptor, I'd have been committing the cardinal sin of running a valve amplifier without an earth connection, and that is something that should never ever be done. Running a valve amplifier without an earth is potentially so dangerous that I regularly check all my mains leads' earths, carry a mains checker (bought from Maplin) in my stage flightcase and always use it, and would advise all of you to do the same.

Controls and connections

Although described as a two-channel head, the 'channels' share the same EQ, presence and reverb controls and can't operate simultaneously, so it's probably better to think of it as a one-channel amplifier with several gain options. The gain options start with the High Gain and Low Gain input jacks that sit at the far right end of the faceplate. Low Gain has 6dB less gain than High, so it's four times quieter. These two inputs can be used simultaneously, although if you do that you'll end up with two low-gain inputs.

Next to these jacks sit the gain controls for the 6260's clean sounds. Either side of the overall Gain pot at five and seven o'clock sit two illuminated switches that activate the Clean section and select either the Clean or Crunch modes. Clean doesn't stay clean for very long as you wind up the Gain knob, and quickly gives you a nice dirty crunchiness that is easy (and rewarding) to control using your guitar's volume control and your pick attack. Crunch mode adds a fairly large amount of gain to the

proceedings and, appropriately set, gives a pretty respectable lead sound on its own. The illuminated Bright switch, sitting up at the two o'clock position, adds 6dB of boost at 2kHz, which adds a bit of an edge to the sound.

Experimenting with various combinations of Clean, Crunch, Gain and my guitars' volume controls was a fun experience, and I ended up preferring to work with a Strat into the Low Gain input, Crunch on, Brightness on, Gain at nine o'clock and using the Strat's volume control to move between clean, crunch and a stinging blues-rock distortion. Mind you, that did leave 75 percent of the Gain control's swing doing nothing, but I found that with Crunch off and the Gain control wound up a fair bit, I got too much background noise for my liking.

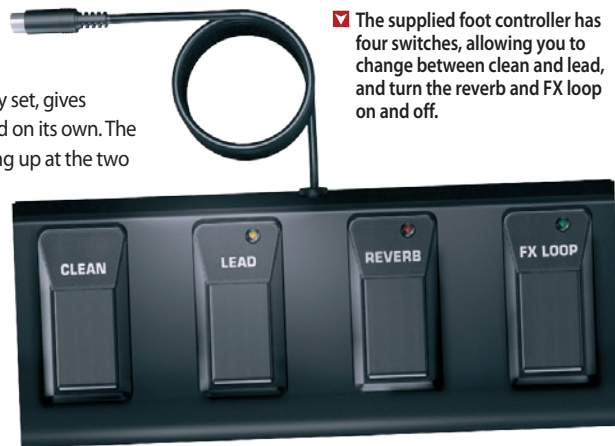
After the Clean section is the Lead section, which comes into action when you hit the illuminated Lead switch. Start winding the gain



▲ On the rear panel, there are Send and Return jacks for the FX Loop, a Preamp Out Send jack, a seven-pin socket for the footswitch, twin loudspeaker jacks with impedance selector, and a mains socket and fuse.

up here and you very quickly get into heavy metal and death metal territory, with more distortion available than anyone is ever going to need. Forget your fuzz boxes and distortion pedals; you could buy this amp and throw them all away. Humbuckers into this section with loads of gain wound on is simple insanity and absolutely great fun (if you like this kind of thing). However, again there's a significant amount of background noise and you'll need to take account of that when you're setting up your distorted sounds. This time around, humbuckers into the High Gain input, guitar flat out and the Lead Gain control held back was the order of my day, and that gave me enough distortion and edge to take on anyone.

Next along the front panel is the EQ, which runs, from right to left, Bass, Mid and Treble. If you're looking for serious sound sculpting here because you don't like the basic sound of



▼ The supplied foot controller has four switches, allowing you to change between clean and lead, and turn the reverb and FX loop on and off.

the 6260, then forget it — you need to go find another amp. These controls are all pretty subtle in operation and are more use in refining tone, rather than creating it. Personally, I'd just set them flat and use the guitar, pick attack and touch to make the sound I wanted to hear, and you should do the same. Practising creating tonal variety with your guitar and your fingers is a really worthwhile thing to get into, and the payback is a much greater variety in, and control of, your sonic palette.

After the EQ comes the separate master volumes for Clean and Lead. Wind these up and (if you've never done it before) you'll find out just how loud 120W of valve-powered amplification can be. The 6260 can really pump out the volume, and you wouldn't catch me playing in front of one of them running flat out for any length of time without some form of hearing protection. Volume at this level is totally addictive; your guitar comes alive in your hands, endless sustain and controllable feedback are there for the taking, and you're surfing that glorious fine line between sonic nirvana and total chaos. When you get up to these volume levels, you'll immediately realise that all the rack gear, speaker emulators and guitar processors in the world can never ever give you the rush that you get from the sheer intensity and trouser-flapping ferocity of a valve amp at full chat. You'll also find out that you can really, really annoy family, friends and neighbours and that there's a reason you don't want to try this at home!

The Master section comes next with its Presence and Reverb controls. The fact that

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Performing Musician

Bugera 6260 £344

The Bugera 6260 is a great-looking, good-sounding and powerful valve amplifier that is most at home on stage, due not only to the sheer volume that it is capable of, but also to the level of background noise that it produces at higher gain settings. At its price, it's probably the cheapest way around to get seriously loud.

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» Presence sits away from the EQ highlights that this control isn't part of the tone stack. Bugera state that the 6260's Presence control modifies the 6260's damping factor at high frequencies, although, more usually, a presence control forms part of an amplifier's negative feedback loop. Whatever the actual mechanism, the effect of the presence control is to boost higher frequencies. However, you shouldn't think of a presence control as another mid/treble control, but rather as a way of tuning the response of the combination of amplifier and cabinet in the higher frequencies. Unlike the 6260's tone controls, its Presence control is quite effective and allowed me to get a very satisfactory tonality with my THD 2 x 12 cabinet.

The spring reverb on the 6260 is a very lush one, and when used either subtly or as an enormous wash of sound, it never fails to impress and is definitely one of this amp's strongest points.

The front panel completes with the usual Standby and Power switches with their associated lamps. Switching on the 6260 brought the first indication of some corner cutting, as the amplifier exhibits a considerable audible hum for a good few seconds until the power supply settles down. There's nothing dangerous in this, it's just a bit annoying. Another power supply foible becomes apparent if you switch the 6260 off before the standby light goes out completely. If you do, you will get the extremely loud crack

“With 120W of glowing valves to power it, the 6260 is capable of enormous dynamic range...”

of a switching transient ripping out of your loudspeakers — not something that will do them much good in the long run.

The back panel is a much less busy place, carrying (from right to left) the mains socket and fuse; the twin loudspeaker jacks and their impedance selector; the seven-pin socket for the supplied footswitch; the Preamp Out Send jack; and the Send and Return for the FX Loop. The footswitch is a hefty, all-metal affair, whose four switches allow you to switch between clean and lead, and to turn the reverb and the FX loop on and off.

The top of the amplifier chassis carries the 6260's five 12AX7 preamp valves and its four 6L6GC output valves. Next to the row of 6L6s are a Bias Test point, a Bias Adjust potentiometer and a switch that allows you to swap bias voltages between the factory-fitted 6L6s and your own set of EL34 valves. Swapping between these two valves lets you set up the 6260's power amp section with a basic sound that is either Fender-ish or Marshall-esque in tonality. Preferring 6L6s as I do, I didn't have a matched quad of EL34s to hand to try this out, but I'd expect the 6L6s to give more low-end thump and a cleaner high end than the EL34s, which should put more mid-range into the basic sound of the amp.

The sounds

With the factory-fitted valves, the 6260 is quite a dark-sounding amplifier with loads of tight low end, a fat, smooth mid-range and a top end that is warm in character, rather than being icy and slicey. Even when running with high levels of distortion, it manages to retain definition in the sound and doesn't mush up like many other amps I can think of. It really does sound good.

Turning up the wick on the volume doesn't really change the overall character, although

high volume and high distortion will tend to thin the sound out, which will allow it to cut through on stage. With 120W of glowing valves to power it, the 6260 is capable of enormous dynamic range, and if you're into detuning your guitar, play baritone guitar or use a Schechter Celloblaster as I do. You'll find that the 6260 will deliver everything you need in low-end grunt without losing the definition that's required to successfully work in that no-man's-land between bass and guitar.

The lush onboard spring reverb adds immensely to the character of the overall sound, no matter how much or how little of it you use, and I couldn't get it to sound nasty whatever the setting.

Now for the bad news. Like all amplifiers that get their distortion from abusing their preamps, the Bugera 6260 suffers from a fair amount of background hiss mixed in with some lower-frequency noise components. At stage levels, these aren't so much of a problem, even though the noises are significantly higher than you'd get from more expensive amplifiers. However, if you're using the Bugera 6260 primarily at home, you're probably not going to be happy unless you're running the amp at fairly low gain levels and you're using your guitar and pick to get the desired distortion.

Conclusion

Luckily for me, I don't need a 120W valve amp head for the gigs I do nowadays, so I'm not tempted to buy this amp. Luckily for you, if you're looking for a seriously loud valve amp for stage use where the 6260's background noise levels aren't going to be an issue, I can't think of a cheaper way to get hold of so much power, and it's going to be very much worth your while to check one out.

However, there is another aspect of the Bugera 6260 that does tempt me, and that is the fact that, at its RRP, it's potentially a cheap and convenient way of getting hold of a good-quality amplifier cabinet, chassis and transformers. I just can't help wondering what I'd get if I started modifying it here and there. Maybe convert it into the point-to-point, hand-wired boutique amp that it styles itself on... Now that would be fun! ■ PM

Tech Spec

6260

- Two-channel preamp design (Clean, Crunch, Lead).
- Two 12AX7A, three 12AX7 valves.
- Four 6L6GC valves (convertible to EL34).
- Preamp input impedance: 470kΩ (high gain), 44kΩ (low gain).
- Peak output power: 120W/ 16Ω, 8Ω, 4Ω.
- Power consumption: max. 350W.
- Vintage EQ with bass, mid and treble.
- Dimensions (WDH): approx. 687.3 x 246 x 249mm.
- Weight: approx. 21.5kg.

