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AUDIO FOR BROADCAST, POST, RECORDING AND MEDIA PRODUCTION

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Interview

Mike Larson

API Audio SR22 and SR24

API introduce new units that — crikey! — don't all rely on its traditional circuitry designs.

GEORGE SHILLING takes a leap into the unknown.



For many decades, API have been pedalling desks and modules based on Saul Walker's 2520 op amp design from 1969. This lent API its reputation for magically clean, yet musical, sonics — and I have long been a fan. It is, therefore, something of a surprise to learn that its new 'Select' range departs from this tradition, though I do recall that something similar was attempted previously with API's 'Arsenal' range from about 13 years ago. While the Select range also features two valve-based units, here we have two lower-priced solid state units: the SR22 stereo/dual compressor and SR24 dual equalizer.

U Got The Look

These both have something of the look of early 2000s TL Audio desks and units, with blue 2U front panels and round meters on the SR22, which illuminate with a yellow glow. The rear of both units usefully includes both XLR and TRS jack connections for inputs and outputs. Jacks have priority for inputs, but you can handily derive output from both sets of connections. These are dual voltage (115V/230V) with a selector switch, a rear fuse holder and IEC mains inlet.

SR22 Compressor

The SR22 is a stereo/dual-mono compressor, replicating a circuit from ATI Paragon mixing consoles of the late 1980s. The controls are sensibly laid out side-by-side for the two channels, with a central pair of custom VU meters, which can individually switch to show Output or Gain Reduction (pleasingly making use of the full width of the meter). Pushing the (unlabelled) front panel power button makes these light up. Three big API-style pointer knobs control Threshold, Ratio and Gain; these feel a little lightweight and plasticky but they operate smoothly, and their ranges are well chosen. Ratio is a nicely progressive continuous control from 1:1 (off) to 10:1, and there's 0 to 20dB of Gain available on the outputs. Buttons on each channel for 'Thrust', Soft Knee, Meter (GR) and In/Bypass illuminate when pressed. Though, as most studio racks present gear below eye level, it seems a poor choice to label all the controls with panel legends below them rather than above.

There is an automatic timing circuit rather than Attack or Release controls, while a central Link button ties everything together — except In and Meter buttons — for easy to use stereo compression. When activated, Stereo settings are governed by the left channel controls, after which the control circuits are summed.

Thrusting

On plugging this across the mix buss, setting it to about a 2:1 ratio and linking the channels, it instantly sounded great with a few dBs of compression. Punching in the Soft Knee made things even more pleasing, as the gentler threshold takes away any pumping and lends a further layer of invisibility while still keeping things under control. The Thrust button is a low frequency filter on the side-chain, which helps further in that it allows a solid bass end to 'ground' the mix without overly affecting the compressor.

The auto timing works beautifully on most types of program, individual instruments and vocals. In terms of character, it's a bit livelier than an LA-2A, with even a hint of Fairchild about the results. It even gelled my drums subgroup with some nice squidge in Hard Knee mode, while the Thrust feature helped the kick drum remain solid. Some items of gear have an indefinable magical quality, and this is one. It's warm, smooth, powerful, and made things sound better with minimal fiddling - and a credit to the engineers at API who developed it.

SR24 EQ

This is a very straightforward dual sweep EQ with +/-12dB of boost or cut on four EQ bands. These cover most eventualities with some overlap between the four bands, covering audio frequencies thus: 20Hz-200Hz, 100Hz-1kHz, 500Hz-5kHz and 2kHz-20kHz. All bands are Peak/Dip type (no shelving), and no filters are provided, nor any level trims. The APSI 562 which it is based on was a popular design from the late 1970s which was marketed and distributed by API for a short period into the early 1980s.

Curvy

The central Power button turns the unit and red power light on. The two channels' In/Bypass buttons are located near enough to the middle for one-handed operation of both, and these glow to indicate 'In'. While not as exquisite as some EQs, the high band sounds sweet when adding sparkle across a mix around 12kHz. It's not impossible to make things sound harsh with too much upper-mid boost; some care is required but, of course, you can go the other way and carve out nasty stuff easily enough. The curves are pretty broad, and you can add a nice low-end warmth while pulling out a touch of low mid for a bit of a loudness curve. There's good headroom and the large knobs make small adjustments of frequency or boost easy.

No Nonsense

I loved both of these devices with their no-nonsense operation and superb sonics. These are fabulous studio tools for the money, but the SR22 Compressor is the real gem here, with a magical character that enhances audio beautifully. **i**

resolution/VERDICT

PROS Clean, musical and great sounding processors, great value, simple to operate

CONS Plasticky knobs, labelling would be better above the controls

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