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elysia mpresor

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STUDIO STANDARDS



Stereo compressor with special functions

CD Track 03

elysia mpressor

Not so long ago, German manufacturer elysia caused a furor with a true compression bolide: in no time at all the alpha compressor became one of the favorite tools of the international mastering engineer community. Now here comes the second coup...

The power to innovate of the young company elysia certainly has its background: Chief engineer Ruben Tilgner is an old hand who has developed the bestsellers GainStation and MixDream for SPL. And with the Transient Designer he proved very early that he not only understands how to build a good signal path, but also knows how to think notably innovative concepts out and make them hit the shelves. elysia remains true to this philosophy on an extremely uncompromising level: with its almost 5-digit price tag, the alpha compressor flagship is a mastering bolide that neither lacks functional range nor technical realization. Both the inside and the outside of this unit are downright exquisite – and even if some vintage fundamentalists might start to cry in the face of such a concept, one thing is for sure: Such a well thought-out unit cannot be found in the market a second time. Now the “younger brother”, the mpressor, gets ready to plough through the field from a different angle.

Its parentage is obvious, as a lot of the design elements of the alpha compressor can also be found on the mpressor. But, being the youngest scion, it needs to go its own way in order to make itself heard. So it does not only appear as a high end unit with noble characteristics, but also offers special functions currently not to be found anywhere else – and especially not in this combination. Also very nice: the set of control elements nevertheless stays pleasingly straightforward.

The concept of the mpressor

With its feed forward control, class A audio paths, fully discrete design (even of the power supply and the detector path) and without transformers in the audio path, the mpressor speaks a very modern “language”: it basically aims at transparency and dynamic and not so much at typical vintage saturation effects – but with certain settings it can be overdriven as well. The detector element is a so called Trans-

conductance Amplifier (TCA) which consists of single transistors that are kept at a distinct operation temperature by a heated copper element. Similar to the oscillators of the Mini-moog, this technique helps to reduce environmental influences on the sound character of the unit. One of its special qualities is that the

Profile

Concept: Stereo compressor
Threshold: -16 to +18 dB
Attack: 0.01 to 150ms
Release: 5 ms to 1.2 s
Ratio: 1.2:1 to 10:1
 negative: -0.3 to -4:1
EQ Gain: +/- 6 dB, high and low cut
EQ Freq: 26 Hz to 22 kHz
GR Limit: 0 to 21 dB
Gain: 0 to 20 dB
Manufacturer: elysia
Internet: www.elysia.com
Net price (Germany): 3,490 Euro

Studio Standards

Quite often we are asked why a low priced unit can get a similarly positive rating as a very expensive one. The answer is easy: we assign our test results in relation to the price category. Of course, there still is a reference class. These are the units that set the top end standards which are the quality benchmark for all other units. In this category we monthly present studio equipment that sets the pattern in its category. Be it analog or digital, vintage or brand-new – this does not matter here. “Vintage” is not necessarily better, and a modern unit is not a naturally inevitable progress. But we do not reserve this category for the high end league only – even LoFi effects can be created in good and bad ways... Please send your questions, proposals and comments to: studiostandards@soundandrecording.de



The control elements of one stereo channel: Lots of possibilities, clearly laid out



Also exemplary: the well arranged rear panel with the XLR pin assignment printed on the housing

noise floor does not rise on strong compression and make-up gain rates. This makes even drastic processing without LoFi artifacts possible. The mpressor is equipped with the typical basic functions of a compressor (see profile). All of its parameters can be controlled with individual pots. On top of this, the mpressor not only offers the possibility to feed an external detector signal into its sidechain, but also has a couple of further features available that lie far beyond the daily grind.

Let us start with the “Auto Fast” function: It helps to cope with a problem that almost every compressor has to fight with and that has become even more severe in our digital age without tape machines helping to smooth signal peaks. If you process a signal with a lot of transients and low end (e.g. a slapped bass or a drum subgroup), the difficulty to choose an adequate attack time of the compressor will pop up. If a very short time is set, the transients will be “caught”, but in most of the cases they will be so short that the

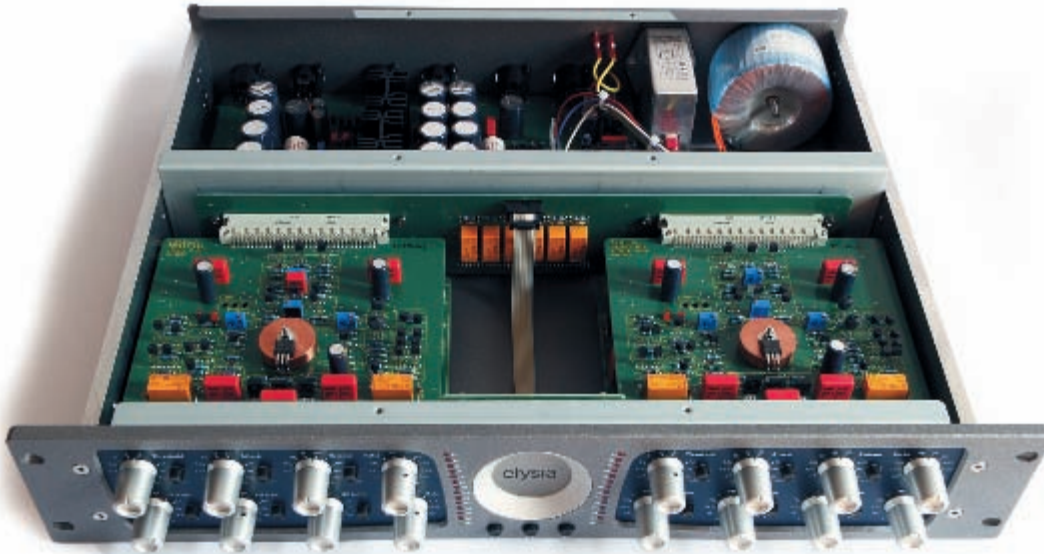
bass frequencies will start to distort – because the compressor is triggered by every single oscillation anew. If you choose to avoid this problem by setting a longer attack time, the transients will not be detected by the compressor, and the use of the unit even becomes counterproductive: The compressor starts to work not until the transients have passed, and this makes the dynamic range even larger and the unit functions as an expander. “Auto Fast” is the solution: It safely catches short and loud signal peaks, even when longer attack settings are chosen in favor of the bass frequencies.

“Anti Log” kind of turns the characteristic of the compressor during the release phase upside down. A compressor usually works in linear or logarithmic mode, whereas the mpressor reverses this process: At the beginning of the compression phase the release time stays longer and it will become faster not before the input level drops significantly – drastic and “effective” results are bound to happen, and the elysia

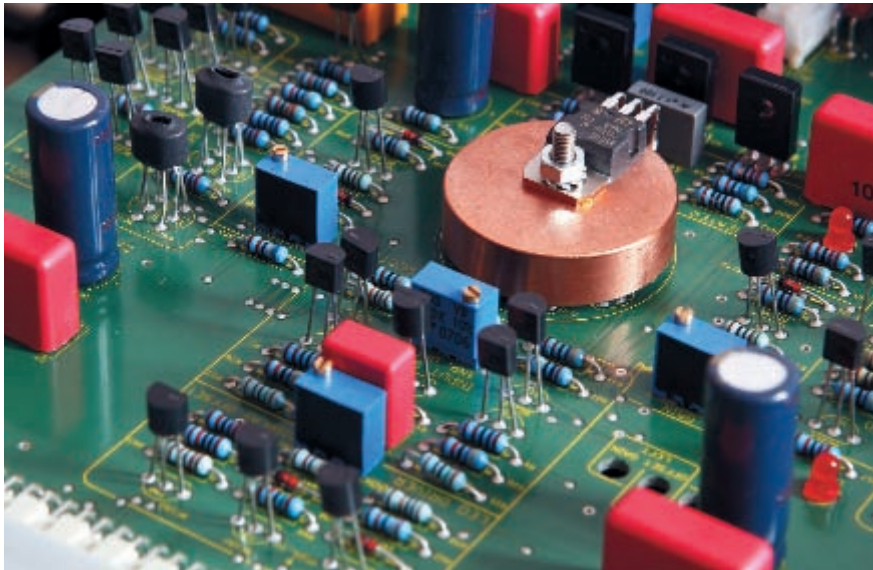
mpressor “grooves” completely different then.

The negative ratio values follow an equally drastic route: The louder the input signal is, the quieter the output signal will become. And additional limiter can be activated for the control voltage of the compressor. Thus the maximum amount of gain reduction can be “frozen” at a fixed value – extreme loud parts can keep their dynamics even when a huge amount of compression is applied.

Furthermore, the mpressor offers a special equalizer (the so called “Niveau Filter”) that is designed to achieve maximum effect with a minimum feature set: The complete frequency range is tilted around a selectable center frequency akin to a pair of scales. All frequencies below the center are boosted by a certain amount, while everything below will be reduced by the same amount – or the other way round. Making a signal overall “darker” or “brighter” can be realized with no effort at all. Last but not least the mpressor has a link func-



The power supply has ample energy reserves and needs almost half of the housing space



The PCBs feature heating elements that keep the operating temperature of the TCA transistors at a stable level.

tion for both of its channels. In order to keep the signal paths short (again, the audiophile approach comes into play), the link only affects the control functions that can now be set with the left channel controllers for both sides. The actual audio signal stages – EQ and gain – still have to be set for each channel individually. The mechanical build is maybe not as exquisite as of the alpha compressor, but do not be fooled by this statement: The manufacturing quality of the mpressor lies considerably above the standards in this price category. Maybe the design of the housing does not fit everybody's

taste, but looking at it from an objective point of view it is beyond any doubt. With its 8 kg of weight (without heavy audio transformers!) the mpressor is built for eternity. Only the power switch is not so practical because it is located on the rear panel of the unit.

In Operation

The mpressor covers a large range of possible sounds. Starting from a neutral and precise basis, the unit mostly presents itself in a clear, punchy and defined manner. But you can certainly unleash the beast within! In the field of "normal" settings it recommends itself as a versatile, good sounding all-round compressor that can unfold its virtues on virtually any

audio signal. But often, a complete parallel universe full of special effects that have never been heard from simple compressors before lies only a little twist of a knob away. Especially the negative ratios (which go together with the Anti Log function nicely) open the door to the world of groove effects that sometimes almost seem to derive from the Granular engine. These features turn the simplest loops into very surprising and inspiring grooves as you can also hear on our demo CD.

A great feature is the "Auto Fast" mode: it makes the mpressor a true loud-maker, more than many other units can claim to be. And finally, the "Niveau Filter" is worth mentioning: It copes with sonic corrections with good results in no time at all. It would have been a great addition if there was the possibility to switch this filter into the detector path of the compressor. A great design achievement is the fact that in face of the extensive functionality and sonic possibilities the unit does with relatively few control elements – the musical approach always stays intuitive.

Conclusion

With the mpressor, elysia managed to create a unit that can oppose a lot of added value against its not really marginal price. If you are interested in a "modern" all-round compressor that can also turn into a creative sound monster by all means, the mpressor is for you. Not only does it cover the "standards", but it shines as a loud-maker and convinces with its spectacular sound effects that partly have never been heard before. Only few vintage compressors (e.g. the Dyna-Mite by Valley People) can sound as drastically, and the mpressor goes even further, but without any noise or other LoFi artifacts. In short: It is not cheap, but it is worth its money without question! ⇐

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