

Abbey Road Plug-ins Brilliance Pack

An in-house design straight from 'that studio' in St John's Wood, these plugs represent depictions of the equalisation blocks they used to have to play with. **GEORGE SHILLING** harks back to a time when engineers smoked at the 'desk', had sideburns and wore a tie to work.

Abbey Road used only EMI-manufactured desks until well into the 1970s, and the EMI REDD.37 and .51 four-track 'Stereosonic' mixing desks (used throughout the 60s for most Beatles records) provided 2-band EQ at fixed frequencies — the top end boost was at 5kHz when the 'Pop' plug-in module was installed (as opposed to the 'Classic' module). This provided bell-curve boost and shelving cut.

To expand the possibilities, the technicians of the day designed an outboard EQ box. These were the 127th pieces of equipment designed in house, and were thus designated the RS127 Brilliance Control, adding or subtracting treble at three selectable frequencies. Known by the engineers as 'the presence box', multiple grey RS127s were rackmounted below the patchbay. However, more units were sometimes required, with the need to sometimes daisy-chain two boxes for extra boost, so a green portable version was also built. According to the excellent Recording The Beatles book (Kevin Ryan and Brian Kehew, Curvember Publishing, 2006) ex-staffers Jerry Boys and Richard Lush both recalled the RS127 with affection. And disc mastering engineer Richard Langham tells of using a touch of RS127 despite the goal of a transparent transfer process.

Lester Smith, technical engineer and custodian

of the vintage equipment at Abbey Road, dusted off some original units for current Abbey Road chief engineer Peter Cobbin, who was working on some Beatles and Lennon-related mix projects. When Cobbin tried these units he was bowled over by their 'instant zing!'. The boxes are passive and unpowered, losing about 10dB of gain. In the 1960s there was a change in impedance standard, and when Cobbin heard an RS127 through an EMI interfacing transformer he discovered the transformer effect exaggerated the EQ curves. Therefore, this plug-in suite includes the original grey rackmounting RS127, and, although the original standalone green box was technically similar, this has been dedicated in plug-in form as a transformer-enhanced version.

Thanks to comprehensive session setup documentation, there is evidence of the extensive use of these boxes throughout the Beatles recordings, with their frequent employment on drum microphones, particularly for snare sounds, as well as guitars and vocals. Especially heavy use was made of these during the making of Sergeant Pepper, and a number were even sent to Apple Studios for Let It Be sessions. According to Ken Townsend, +10 at 10k was a popular setting. They were even used as a side-chain processor to turn the Fairchild 660 into a de-esser, and were also

inserted across Chamber and Plate sends. To boost frequencies between the desk's 5kHz and the RS127's 10kHz, another box was devised, the RS135. This was originally designed to operate at 16.4kHz but was modified to choke down the frequency to 8.192kHz. This is a single frequency boost-only device, and a recreation is also included here.

This suite of plug-ins comprising recreations of these three boxes is available from the abbeyroadplugins.com website and nicely complements their TG plug-ins, which are still available. However, unlike the TGs, these new plugs have been developed in-house (without the help of Chandler), with the technical assistance of Softube AB of Sweden, who also developed the Tube Tech CL-1B plug-in.

These processors come in Mac or PC flavour, with versions for TDM, RTAS, AU and VST. Installation is straightforward and authorisation is via iLok, so this is all very easy. The plug-in supports mono, stereo, multichannel and multimonos configurations and sample rates up to 192kHz. I was surprised and a little disappointed to find that there was no AudioSuite version — offline processing in Pro Tools can still be useful, especially when you might need to free up a plug-in slot and with single-band EQs, five slots can fill up fairly quickly.

The RS127 Rack opens in an enormous window



— it is especially huge considering there are just two knobs to adjust. This grey-coloured version features boost and cut in 2dB steps from -10 to +10dB, and a three-position frequency selector with 2.7, 3.5 and 10kHz. The boost is a broad bell-curve response, while cutting uses a slightly narrower curve. For a touch of gentle top boost at 10k, this sounds lovely — elegant and silky smooth. It can be like removing the blankets on vocals. The 3.5k setting makes things poke through (*Through the blankets? Ed*), or with a little cut settles aggressive sounds back in the mix. The 2.7 setting adds a touch of 'honk', but it's still fairly genteel. This plug-in never gets harsh, even with large boosts, and you can understand how daisy-chaining multiple units became a useful technique. However, for normal use on well-recorded signals, one instantiation is plenty, and if you need a bit more poke, the green version makes a good alternative.

The RS127 Box is the transformer-hyped version and although the controls are identically labelled, the effects of this green-faced version are slightly different



the transformer effect creates a narrower bandwidth, and there is significantly more boost than at the equivalent settings on the Rack version. This is great for poking certain signals out from the mix, and I can't envisage wanting two of these in series as there



is plenty of boost here. The two lower frequencies add characterful midrange honk reminiscent of many Beatles tracks. The 3.5/4.2k setting

potentially slightly nasty, and the 2.7/2.9k setting adding a telephony character with full boost.

from the Rack version. The interfacing transformer shifts the centre frequencies of the available settings, so they now in reality become 2.9kHz, 4.2kHz and 11.5kHz, giving an extra sparkle. When boosting at higher settings,

and (pretend) patching area couldn't really be any simpler. It has a 'medium-sharp' bell-shape boost at 8.192kHz with boost only settings from 0 to +10 in 2dB steps. It can be very useful for giving a different colour to a signal, making it blend better with tracks where the other plug-ins in the suite have been used. It has the subtler flavour of the RS127 Rack, and 10dB boost is perfectly reasonable to use on many signals, although +6 or +8 is usually plenty to lend a lovely sparkle to muffled vocals.

None of these plug-ins emulate anything other than EQ curves; no distortion, noise, or any other funny business is going on, just accurate emulations of the curves of the original units. But they work really well and sound exceptionally musical. It's a lot of fun being a 1960s Abbey Road engineer! ■

PROS A fun way of adding treble for Beatles-fan-engineers.

CONS No AudioSuite versions; settings are not retained when switching between versions of the RS127; unnecessarily large windows (although that's part of the fun!)

EXTRAS Here are some of the originals. The Brilliance Pack is priced at US\$499 for TDM and \$249 for LE/Native.



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