

Gyraf Audio Gyratec II Recording Channel

Just when you thought there were no new angles on the valve outboard trick, along come a bunch of Danes with a whole range of tube equipment. It's handmade, it's individual and it's a lot less than you thought you'd have to spend.

GEORGE SHILLING



IN RECENT YEARS, the Danes have taken their audio very seriously, and this Gyraf is no exception. It is an all-tube recording channel with a mic/line preamp, EQ and compressor. Solid state components feature only in the sidechain and power supply, the signal flow only passes through valves, transformers and passive components.

Although it is an imposing 3U construction with robust handles, the Gyratec II is not overly weighty. Inside are four dual-triode valves of a fairly common type. The rear panel is very simple with only the three XLR sockets for Mic Input, Line Input and Output, and an IEC mains input. The large knobs on the front are vintage style and although I suspect a fairly cheap variety, they are pleasant to use and all work beautifully, with clear pointer marks. However, oddly, there is little to point them to; there are no markings around any of the variable knobs, or even EQ frequency indications.

When the power knob is clicked on, the VU illuminates dimly – there are no other lights or indicators. This meter can show input or output level, or compressor gain reduction. Using the preamp is simply a matter of selecting the desired input with the rotary selector, and setting gain and output levels. The Gain knob has 11 discrete settings, while the Output knob is continuous but gently clicks round, as if there are multiple dÉtentes.

There is plenty of gain available, and the mic preamp exhibits a classy and smooth character, with a smidgen of the 'shouty' mid enhancement of the MindPrint DTC, and slightly less bass warmth than the delicious Phoenix DRS-2 or UA 2-610. But it always sounds appealing and detailed, and these tonal characteristics can be easily shaped with the onboard three-band EQ. A front panel instrument input is also selectable, this is an unbalanced jack input with high impedance. It sounds fairly neutral, with natural low and high frequencies; undoubtedly better than any passive DI box, and the onboard processing is ideal for treating such signals.

Before the EQ is a switchable filter, with 6dB shelves at 90Hz or 160Hz. These gently reduce proximity effect and excessive lows in a manner that does not overly degrade the signal, and I prefer this to

harsh 18dB/octave filters that can cause problems higher up the range.

The EQ section is really quite unusual. All three bands feature very broad, gentle curves; the EQ is a passive design. This stops anything nasty ever happening, and I always achieved good results, despite the lack of facility to tweak narrow areas. The frequency selectors on each band feature six positions covering a wide range, with centre detented boost/cut knobs. Early models included labelling for the frequencies, but as these bands work quite differently from conventional EQs it was decided to leave them off. I, for one, don't mind that as in this case, it's good to tweak by ear.

For the record, the Low Frequency section is a shelf with 6dB points (I presume at full cut/boost) at between 105Hz and 360Hz, High Frequency shelf points are between 225Hz and 1.5kHz, and Mid curve centres at between 400Hz and 2kHz. However, this tells you nothing about how lovely this EQ sounds – it really is very smooth and graceful. Boosting the High Frequency shelving section is like lifting a veil from your signal, and although the frequencies look oddly low on paper, there is plenty of high-end sheen available.

The character of the EQ takes some getting used to; reducing an EQ gain won't necessarily make the signal quieter overall. You might struggle to problem-solve like you would with a Focusrite, but given the right combination of performer, room acoustic and correctly chosen and positioned microphone, the results will be exceptional.

The compressor can be switched to be pre- or post-EQ. It works optically and sounds more like an LA-2A than a Joemeek. It apparently exhibits something similar to the useful two-stage release characteristic of the LA-2A, with the bonus of continuously variable Threshold, Ratio, Attack and Release. It features a fast-acting resistive element, which gives a very wide range of control.

There is an extremely flexible and wide range of available settings, the Ratio variable between 1:1 and 1:30, and the Attack and Release varying from very slow indeed to fairly fast, although not as fast as some modern VCA designs. Suitable settings for vocals are easily achieved, and the compressor can bring a warm

presence to any signal. It is great for fashioning vintage piano sounds. I did, however, experience a strange effect when the Threshold and Ratio knobs were set to their extreme settings. This resulted in an odd delaying of the onset of compression by a second or so, most noticeable with fast settings. However, in real life you would rarely want the knobs in these positions.

The lack of legending means using a white chinagraph to note settings that you might want to repeat, but this is a machine for tweaking until it sounds right and that is a reasonable enough design philosophy. The Gyratec II is sonically similar in some ways to the Manley VoxBox, but at a somewhat lower price. I will, as you might have expected, stick my neck out, and say that I would be more than happy to make this Gyraf the centrepiece of my main recording chain. Of course, it stands head and shoulders above its rivals! ■

PROS

Great sounding mic pre; unusually graceful EQ; flexible and characterful LA-style compressor; good value package.

CONS

No calibration or legending; compressor behaves weirdly at extreme setting; uses a lot of rack space for a mono unit.

EXTRAS

All Gyraf units are handmade and can be customised for the buyer with such things as stepped resistors instead of pots for mastering applications. Prices for the full range are in Danish Kroner and exclude VAT and shipping.



G2 tube recording channel 13000 DK
G3 stereo optical compressor 12000 DK
G9 Dual tube mic preamp 10000 DK
G10 vari-mu stereo compressor 22500 DK
G6 stereo +/- stereo EQ 15000 DK
G8 stereo passive EQ 15000 DK
G4 dual mono optical compressor 15000 DK

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