

PreSonus Eureka

The recording channel sector has a new contender in the form of this handsome preamp, compressor and EQ.

ROB JAMES has a bit of a Eureka moment.



FINDING A SUITABLE NAME for a new product can be a difficult and frustrating business. If you are addressing an international market it takes a great deal of care to ensure that a name that sounds fine in English doesn't mean something obscene or silly in another language — the Rolls Royce Silver Shadow was to have been the Silver Mist until somebody pointed out what this means in German... Sometimes manufacturers just don't seem to care. Thus we have the Volkswagen Sharan.

PreSonus has hit on a good answer with Eureka. Despite the minor association with overflowing bath water, the word is pretty universal and conjures images of sagacity and revelation perfectly appropriate for a product of the this type.

The PreSonus Eureka combines a single channel, transformer coupled, Class A preamplifier with compressor and parametric equaliser at the reasonable

asking price of UK£359 including VAT. The front panel is divided into four sections, preamp, compressor, EQ and output. I would have preferred the EQ and compressor sections the other way round.

All the pots have dinky anodised blue knobs with a soft, indented feel to them. Apart from being satisfyingly tactile this also confers the positive benefit of repeatable settings via the simple expedient of counting the clicks. All the LEDs are blue including the buttons, all of which are internally illuminated. Prominent in the centre of the front panel, the oval analogue VU meter is brightly lit by a conventional bulb for that 'vintage' look.

This is one of those units you can just use without even opening the manual. Low noise even at high gain settings immediately impressed. EQ is fairly subtle around the centre positions and maybe that is the way it should be on this kind of device. On the other hand,

extreme settings produced rather unpleasant muddy effects. The compressor is more than adequate for the price point and very usable. The Saturate control seems to do a lot less than I would have expected especially when compared with the valve saturation controls found on other PreSonus units, e.g. the Firestation. So subtle was the effect I am forced to wonder if this particular unit was functioning correctly.

Eureka acquitted itself well with male and female voices and guitar. I noticed tangible improvements in clarity and noise level when compared with the console's built in mic preamps and there is plenty of headroom. Setting the input level is surprisingly easy even though there are only three LEDs to help, although I found the tiny panel legends difficult to discern in the stygian gloom of the studio. Small fingers are a definite advantage with this number of controls on a 1U panel.

Leaving aside the bells and whistles, Eureka is well worth auditioning purely as a mic pre and especially if you are considering acquiring a more expensive unit. The optional digital interface will considerably enhance the appeal for many potential purchasers. ■

Knobs and knockers



The first section is the preamp. Above the unbalanced Instrument socket, three blue LEDs indicate input level at -20dB, 0dB and clip. Switches select line input, 48V Phantom powering, -20dB pad, 80Hz 12dB/octave filter and phase reverse. Gain is continuously variable between 10dB and 54dB indicated on the panel although curiously the actual minimum is 12dB and the maximum 52dB according to the manual.

Impedance offers switched choices of 2500, 1500, 600, 150 and 50ohms. Using anything other than 2500ohm merely degraded the sound of my condenser mics but the lower values could be useful with ribbons and some dynamics. Saturate varies the drain current of the input buffer FET with the object of adding even harmonic distortion.

The compressor section has Threshold, Ratio and Gain pots at the top along with the Soft knee switch. In the bottom row the Bypass switch is followed by Attack, Release and Sidechain high pass filter pots. In the EQ section, the three bands are arranged in triangular groups with Q and Frequency next to each other and gain as the vertical point of the triangle. However, the gain is at the bottom for the Low and High bands and at the top for the mid. I found this very unintuitive when reaching for a control in a dark studio. At the left of the EQ section the EQ > CMP button places the EQ before the compressor section in the signal chain where I would have expected to find it in the first place. The Bypass button is in the right-hand corner. The master section is sparsely populated with just output gain and a GR to Meter switch. This simply switches the VU meter to show gain reduction.

Around the back, the microphone input is XLR, line input, insert send and return are balanced jacks and both XLR and balanced jack outputs are provided. Power is IEC with switch. Voltage is set internally.

Potentially of greater interest is the option slot, designed to accept a two channel 192kHz 24-bit A-D card. This will add AES-EBU and SPDIF outputs at sample rates of 192kHz, 96kHz, 48kHz and 44.1kHz for around UK£120 including VAT. Dithering is available if a 16-bit output is required. A line-input jack allows a pair of Eureka's to share the two channels of a single digital output card.

PROS

Low noise; good headroom; FET compressor.

CONS

Hard to see settings; could be difficult for people with big fingers.

EXTRAS

Firepod from PreSonus is described as a 24-bit/96k recording studio that includes eight mic preamps, SPDIF and MIDI I-O and Steinberg's Cubase SE 48-track, 24-bit/96k recording software. Compatible



with Windows XP and Mac OSX, the interface has a headphone output and a mix knob to balance monitoring levels between mixed input and main output signals, for zero-latency monitoring.

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