

SSL Mynx & E Series Modules

SSL has been expanding its range of XLogic modules for its X-Rack system but the arrival of the Mynx makes the choice available in a smaller and more affordable package.

GEORGE SHILLING gets to grips with modules that are a blast from his past.

SSL's XLogic X-Rack system is now well established with a wide range of modules with the flexibility to cater for all kinds of application, and boasting the major attractions of mixer configuration possibilities, Total Recall, and the excellent sonics of SSL's SuperAnalogue circuitry.

The Mynx opens the door to some of this processing for those on a lower budget, or for situations where only one or two modules and no recall are required. The unit itself is a lightweight aluminium housing, made from 4mm extruded aluminium, with space at the front for slotting in two XLogic modules. Rubber feet are supplied for table-top use, and I can't think why you wouldn't want to attach these. There is a window in the rear to access connections, and secured by two countersunk hex screws on the front, and a further two hex screws that secure the rear through the rear panel. Fitting is straightforward and once secured, there is no play, and little risk of modules becoming unseated.

The rear power connector is a DIN socket; I'm not a fan of these, for the simple fear of some twonk connecting it to a MIDI device. There is also no power switch, which while it is no disaster is perhaps further evidence of cost-saving. To this socket you connect the flying lead from the external power supply box which includes an IEC mains socket. The cheeky little Mynx may lack the recall facilities of its big brother, but this fuss-free, solid and good-looking box does exactly what it is supposed to do.

The review model was supplied with new E Series recreations of Dynamics and EQ, introduced following the discontinuation of the E Signature Channel. There have been few years since their introduction when there haven't been E Series designs in the SSL catalogue, so you wouldn't think much archaeology would be required, but the blurb that comes with the unit states that the archives were extensively researched to accurately recreate the sound of early SL 4000 E desks, which now date back some 30 years. These



two new modules continue the family tree, but are not strict replicas of the original strip sections as we shall see.

The Dynamics module comprises the familiar Gate and Compressor sections. The light-grey capped knobs relate to the compressor/limiter. This simple to use section defined the sound of the 80s, with engineers happily squashing every signal on the tape without reaching for a single patch cord. In normal release mode this reissue has all the 'booff-daff' I remember for compressing drums, adding attack, but in a smooth and controlled manner. I instinctively

modules are each tried to pull the

Release knob out for fast attack, but that function has now been moved to a little grey pushbutton, no doubt to facilitate the way that Recall works on the larger X-Rack frame. This extremely fast attack mode was always useful for taming overly aggressive transients and the auto gain make-up meant that this was a quick and easy way of giving certain signals some lift without resorting to automation rides.

It all sounds reassuringly familiar, but this module also features brand new Linear Release (as opposed to logarithmic) mode and Peak Sensing (as opposed to over-easy) mode buttons. This hard-knee setting sounds great, far more aggressive for really punchy drums — how different might the hits of the 80s have sounded if consoles had had this button? It takes away some of the rubberiness of the normal soft-knee mode and allows for far wider use, with a more contemporary sound. No doubt due to the new compressor features, the Link button is relocated to the bottom of the gate section, although it relates only to the compressor section.

For gate linking there is a key input on the rear. On the old consoles, the Link button worked by chaining to the adjacent channel, but here any modules in a rack with Link buttons engaged will have their compressor/limiter control



voltages connected. The excellent Expander/Gate was mainly responsible for cleaning up 1980s tape hiss in Expander mode, but it was also handy for closing down drum mics (in Gate mode) and eliminating any of that undesirable room spill, to make way for the huge digital gated reverbs that became popular. On the console, Expander mode was default and a Gate button enabled more extreme processing, but curiously the tables are turned here, with Gate mode the default and an Expander button switching to that mode.

An interesting feature of the EQ module is the provision of a black knob/brown knob mode button, effectively providing two distinctly different EQ types. One thing that particularly defined the success of SSL in the 1980s was the company's willingness to listen to customer comments and requests. E Series desks became popular because of their recall facilities, fantastic automation, supreme clarity of status and ease of operation; these attributes seemed to take priority over sonic excellence. I thought perhaps the balance later went the other way with the J Series. Soon after I landed my first job in 1984 at Livingston Studios, studio manager Jerry Boys and owner Nic Kinsey ordered a 4000 E but suggested to SSL that the EQ might be improved and, as it happened, SSL was canvassing opinions on this and redesigning the circuitry. Livingston measured the curves of its MCI JH500 console and suggested these narrower bell-curves to be incorporated, and the first 'Black knob' desk went in to Livingston in prototype form. Subsequent production versions had slightly broader bell curves, and the unique Livingston console remains in situ, much loved by clients.

The original 'brown' mode is perceptibly smoother and warmer due to wider bandwidth and slightly less range on the boost and cut knobs, so although I'm a dyed-in-the-wool 'black knob' man, the 'brown' can sometimes have its uses. Perhaps the easiest way to describe the difference is that you can't do such convincing pretend wah-wah with 'brown'.

The upper-mid green section adds or subtracts those pokey aggressive frequencies with great effectiveness, while the blue low-mid section's gain is usually turned anti-clockwise, removing woofy clogging frequencies. I sometimes wished it would go lower than the indicated 200Hz, and that setting was often where the sweep stayed, while the low frequency would be boosting in Bell mode (as opposed to shelving) for a tight bottom end. However, there is some overlap between the bands, and this EQ is powerful and effective. But where are the high and low pass filters on this reissue? The filters were never particularly aggressive but were a useful part of the E Series strip, and part of the sound. Regrettably they are missing from this module. However, it's lovely to acquaint yourself with these old E Series chums, and I do like the new Peak compressor mode. ■

PROS Mynx makes owning SSL modules more affordable; authentic E Series sonics; new compressor Peak mode sounds great.

CONS Fast attack no longer on pull-knobs; dynamics defaults to Gate rather than Expander; more small grey buttons detract slightly from the ease of use and elegance of the original desk and confuse ageing Luddites; no High and Low Pass Filters.

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