

# Sound Devices 302

A portable mixer becomes an intimate item in a sound recordist's life and the attachment cultures fierce loyalty and dependence. **NEIL HILLMAN** is smitten, as if for the first time. The philanderer.



**IT STARTED AS NO MORE** than a passing thought, but a website has re-opened a relationship long-thought past. How had they developed, what did they become? Could we, should we perhaps, make a go of it? What would others think seeing us together? But yet, and this is the thing, it feels so comfortable.

A marriage of many summers in question, and there are clearly financial implications too; yet it just feels so right to be feeling this way. There is no denying the physical attraction either, but where does loyalty lie in all of this? Do the previous ten years together count for nothing? Yet it has stirred and re-affirmed some very deeply distracting feelings. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but I feel, with a heavy, heavy heart, that there is a certain inevitability to all this.

I, by the way, am not the only one; so don't you sit there in judgment of me. I don't know of any other location sound recordist who wouldn't take as seriously the decision to replace his mixer; and the Sound Devices 302 compact production mixer has a lot going for it. Not least of all, it is probably the most compact and comprehensively featured mixer in its class.

With all of its controls contained on three surfaces, the 302's 3-in, 2-out layout clearly shows the Sound

Devices family traits, the most striking being the 'Rainbow-whoosh' metering — my terminology, not Sound Devices' I hasten to add. It's the same 40-segment, green, orange and red LEDs, with 4 levels of brightness, as fitted to the bigger, 4-input, 442 mixer. But the joy of this mixer is its size, weight and power consumption; the joy being that these attributes are meagre: three AA batteries last the day with care.

The front panel is the heart of the device, carrying the majority of the constantly varied controls. The three individual channel-fader knobs stand proudest, unsculpted like other mixer manufacturers favour, but with a pleasing friction to them. Each channel has a Pan switch to route it to Left, Centre or Right located one side of the fader, while on the other side is an HPF selector that allows selection between 80Hz, 160Hz or flat.

The course gain trim-pot is above and to the right of the channel faders, a spring-loaded push-pot design that recesses flush with the front panel after adjustment, keeping a clear space for the operation of the channel fader knobs. Alongside the trim pot and between channel 1 and 2's faders, is a polarity reversal switch, which places channel 2 180 degrees out of phase with the inputs of channel 1 and 3; necessary

to flip the image for instance when moving an MS microphone from overhead to underneath. Two LED's sit directly above each fader: a red to show Peak as the channel approaches 3dB before clipping, and orange to show Limiter as a channel's input limiter is operating. These input limiters have a fixed threshold of +18dBu, with attack and release times of 1ms and 200ms respectively. The input limiter's ratio is set at 20:1.

The output limiter is adjustable, however, in 1dB increments from +4 to +20dBu, by entering a user set-up menu that enables 18 features to be adjusted. The Limiter may be set to Off, On for dual-mono or Link for stereo operation, by a 3-position switch above the meter display. Other facilities accessed through this procedure include: linking channels 1 and 2 for stereo or MS work; the selection of metering ballistics between VU or PPM (or various combinations within the Peak-VU-PPM permutations); altering the oscillator frequency between 1kHz, 400Hz and 100Hz; or the oscillator level between -20 and +8dBu in 1dB increments from a default of 0dBu. The relatively clear operating panel of the 302 comes at the expense of burying away some set-up combinations that might otherwise have been achieved by a switch on the control surface.

Monitoring is comprehensive; selectable on the front panel between inputs 1, 2 or 3, Left, Right, Mono, Stereo, Return and MS-matrix. Next to the selection switch is the headphone level switch, sitting across the 3.5mm headphone output, which is located on the left side panel. Also on this panel are the three transformer balanced, female XLR inputs, with 1+2 designated as the MS inputs respectively. Each channel carries a 3-way switch to select phantom, T power or dynamic inputs. Phantom may be selected between +12V or +48V.

The right panel carries the two active balanced male XLR outputs. The default output setting is for a unity gain, line-level signal; but the output may be adjusted through the set-up menu to anything between mic and line level. There is also an unbalanced Tape Out feed available on a TA-3 locking connector, isolated from the main output, which can drive consumer interfaces or, through a dedicated cable, link to a 442 mixer.

I like this 302 even more than the first SD device I reviewed some time ago, the baby MixPre. If these little American mixers were motorcycles, they would be Buells; designed with a purpose, proficient, yet daring to be just that little bit different. Price is UK£1287 inc. VAT.

But certainly for now, I need to be sensible, and beg my head to still this beating heart; particularly where small, dark beauties are concerned. Small and dark; that's a departure for me. Previous wives have been blonde. ■



## PROS

Its mini-size and price is an utter delight for those long days on your feet, coupled to a DigiBeta camcorder, where a presenters radio mic and an MS mic on a pole is the full extent of kit in use.

## CONS

Making changes through the user set-up menu is a real fiddle, made bearable only by the entertaining Northern Lights nature of the display that accompanies any adjustments.

## Contact

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