

LA Audio TCX2

dual **tube** compressor

After auditioning this dual-channel tube compressor, Chris Reiger discovers there may be a soul to LA after all.

The recently released TCX2 dual tube compressor from LA Audio landed on my desk with a thud. “Not another tube box”, I heard my subconscious grumbling. It seems the words ‘Tube Is Good’ have been the R&D mantra of recent years, with every man and his dog clambering to provide us with yet another valve

release is in the order of 0.4s to 4.0s. Each side has an eight-segment LED indicating the amount of gain reduction, and above each of these meters is a six slot grill, which I imagine allows a little air to get to the valves mounted inside. The TCX2 may contain valves, but I found the normal operating temperature of the

device to be comparatively low – so you don’t need to agonise over how to avoid overheating

solution to our digital recording dilemma. But then, I also knew that LA Audio has built up a solid reputation over the last few years for a range of equipment that not only sounds good, but is cost effective as well. So I suspended my disbelief, at least until I heard what the TCX2 had to offer.

The TCX2 is one member of the Millennium range of devices released by LA Audio, which complements their existing Classic and Pro ranges. The Millennium series consists of a number of processors designed with the home and project studio owners in mind. They are very competitively priced but aim to offer real quality. Like other devices in the range, the TCX2 is light grey in colour and has a full complement of rubber knobs across the front panel. LA Audio describe their use of tubes as ‘Tubesonics circuitry’. This entails a combination of solid state gain control with input and output tube amplification – so the compression characteristics are handled solely by solid state means and the tube sound is applied on input and output only. As you would expect, it supports both -10dBv and +4dBu input and output, utilising XLR and TRS jack connectors on the back panel. It also has side chain connections, again using TRS connectors, as you would expect of such a device.

The front panel is laid out very simply and intuitively, starting from the left with the input gain control which ranges from -6dB to +16dB. Threshold is set from -30dB to +20dB, and ratio ranges from 1:1 to 10:1. The attack range can be set between 1ms and 100ms, while

it, or other units around it, in your rack. The front panel also contains bypass switches and a switch to stereo couple the two compressors, in which case the left side compressor over-rides. Interestingly, both ‘Gain Make Up’ controls of each compressor work independently in stereo mode, so you’ll have to ensure that the two levels are set identically when processing a stereo input. Of course this is no problem and is a handy feature when having to readjust a stereo image that may have somehow fallen heavier on one side through some mixing error.

Brothers Up In Arms

My first use of the TCX2 was to run a produced CD through it – which happened to be a Chemical Brothers CD. I was sitting in the studio with a friend and began playing the CD. My friend commented on how the Chemical Brothers’ sounds are always in your face, hard and biting, and this particular CD was certainly no exception. I agreed, and then turned to patch the TCX2 into the signal path. To my surprise, it was already patched in and we were in fact listening to the CD through the compressor. I quickly hit bypass to listen to the program material unadulterated, and again, to our surprise, the Chemical Brothers CD didn’t have half the impact it had when I first played it through the compressor. With the TCX2 back in the chain, I carefully adjusted the input, which provided varied results – from a soft warming of the sound to a downright smash-’em-up, punchy mix enveloped in warm, to profound distort-



tion. It was our opinion that perhaps The Chemical Brothers should think about acquiring a TCX2 to give their music that extra bit of bang, or at least run their mixes through it... I know I will be.

My second move was to employ the TCX2 in the recording of a voiceover job for TV, using a voiceover person that I often work with. I used a Rode NT-2 with a popper stopper. The TCX2 gave his voice extra warmth and depth, and with the right amount of compression I ended up with what I would consider to be an excellent result.

The next day I recorded a singer through the TCX2. Again, the results were very pleasing. I was satisfied that I was using a device that gave these recordings certain characteristics that were pleasing to the ear. 'Warmth' and 'smoothness' were two words that came very much to mind.

My next effort was to run an old Roland Juno 6 analogue synth through it, having set up a sound that would remain unchanged on the synth during the test. Instead, I wanted to see what sort of powers of sonic manipulation I could have with the TCX2's controls. Again, the results were very pleasing. I wound up the input, balanced it out by trimming the output, and it gave the Juno a whole new set of legs. The distortion I was able to induce was reminiscent of an old valve guitar amp I used to own. Great flexibility. Anyone who likes to bend and twist the sounds of their synths, by recording them through amps and the like, should think about this kind of setup. The TCX2 worked very well, offering a sonic palette that ranged from ultra smooth and warm, to over-compressed, biting distortion.

One thing that has always annoyed the hell out of me when I've looked at other compressors in this price range is what they often do to the bottom end of the original signal. There's nothing worse than finding that not only are the highs attenuated, which you might reasonably expect using a compressor, but the bottom end has disappeared and the program sound has turned into something thin and nasty. This is not the case with the TCX2. There are a number of manufacturers out there who should take a listen to this unit and learn something!

The TCX2 should prove itself to be a very useful acquisition for any studio, large or small. Of course, one of the best things about the TCX2 is its price, \$1295. For that sort of money you get an extremely useful and powerful device that will provide you with a great way to record vocals, guitar etc. as well as offering keyboard heads a way of processing their digital (in particular) or analogue synthesisers. LA Audio have done their reputation no harm with the TCX2. It's a device well worth investigating.



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