



Softube PC MAC Drawmer S73



\$99

The Scandie purveyors of fine plugin fare power on with a model of Drawmer's three-band FET mastering compressor

> Released in 2015, the original Drawmer 1973 hardware is a multiband mastering compressor enabling detailed control over its three bands and the crossover frequencies dividing them. Softube's plugin version (VST/AU/AAX) is condensed to give the flavour of the hardware without the potential minefield for the uninitiated of actually using it. Essentially, it takes ten multiband presets - called Styles - and gives you a 'more or less' Amount knob with which to adjust the depth of processing applied. Multiband compression made very simple, then.

As well as the Styles and Amount controls, there's an Air switch that introduces the ultra-high frequency shelving boost so beloved of mastering engineers. You also get an 'LED' Gain Reduction Meter and old-school stereo VU meters for output level, a Mix knob for parallel compression, and a Gain knob to make up the output if necessary. It really couldn't be easier to use: find a style that works and set the Amount to suit. If that's beyond you, there's a series of rather meaningless factory presets to work from!

Users and over-users

Automatic 'Finalizer-style' multiband mastering processors can be very dangerous in the wrong hands, and very easy to over-apply. They make the source material sound louder, brighter and thus 'better' by impression, but can actually all too easily destroy the dynamics, ruining the

subtleties of the original musical intention. Softube call S73 an 'Intelligent Mastering Processor', suggesting that it somehow analyses the incoming audio and adapts the settings to it. But no, what that actually refers to is the combination of under-the-hood settings defined by the Style selection.

The first thing you might notice when you insert S73 is that even with the Amount at 0, where you would expect no change, there's a level increase that varies depending on the Style selected but can be as much as 4dB (with the Gentle Compression Style). This has to do with the combination of variable initial band gains, and makes assessing the merits of the Styles difficult. Turning up the Amount not only lowers thresholds and thus increases gain reduction, but also tweaks other behind-the-scenes parameters such as attack and release at the same time to give a musically fluid change. Pushing the Amount until the gain reduction shows about -3 to -6dB keeps things safe, but any more than that and transient dynamics start to lose impact, even though the compression is so smooth it's definitely usable up to -10dB.

The Air switch is quite unobvious in its ultra-high frequency provision, and will probably be too much for reasonably balanced mixes.

S73 sounds very smooth and helps to bring clarity and other effective corrections to mixes. And, of course, if you like the clarity added by

one Style and the width worked in by another, there's nothing stopping you stacking multiple instances. On the downside, the varying volume levels make it very difficult to A/B S73 with any certainty that it's not just making things louder - a few memory slots for switching settings with matched output gains would be useful.

Drawmer S73 is a semi-automatic mastering device that takes the pain out of multiband compression for those untrained in the art. It does the job very well, but naturally, you still need a good pair of ears to be sure you're not falling into the trap of over-egging. **cm**

Web www.softube.com

Alternatively

iZotope Ozone 7
cm227 » 10/10 » £175/349
Extraordinarily powerful mastering suite with style-based presets

FabFilter Pro-MB
cm200 » 9/10 » £129
Popular multiband mastering compressor with a great sound

Verdict

For Easy to use
Sounds smooth and subtle, generally
Air switch gives instant pro mastering finish to dull mixes
Well considered Style presets

Against Dangerous in the wrong hands
Volume mismatches between Styles
Air switch can be over the top

Drawmer S73 makes multiband mastering compression truly effortless, although it's not idiot-proof and can easily be overcooked

Style counsel

S73's Styles are divided into three groups: Clean, Bass Control and Spatial. The five Clean Styles are designed to improve definition in the mix. Clarity 1 works hard on the upper-mid frequencies, adding presence; Clarity 2 does the same but with a bit more body in the lower mids; Neutral does little in the way of tonal adjustment, applying just subtle compression; and Gentle Compression does more than it suggests, gluing the bottom end, but is a bit misleading with its

big volume boost. More Air brings out the top end, brightening dull mixes.

The Bass Control group consists of just two Styles: De-rumble reduces low frequencies in a boomy mix, and Punch boosts the bottom end in a very unobvious way that works well on overly light mixes. Finally, the three Spatial Styles - Wide Mix, Ambience and Vocal Enhance - do exactly as the names suggest, using a combination of mid/side processing, compression and frequency balancing.