

Plugin Alliance Compression & EQ

The Plugin Alliance range just keeps getting bigger as more companies enter the fold. Stuart Bruce looks at some of the latest EQ and compression offerings



Brainworx bx_pan EQ

\$299

bx_pan EQ is essentially a three-band fully parametric EQ where each band is full range (40Hz to 20kHz) and can have a near surgical Q right through to a broad bell. The trick is that you can infinitely pan each band across the stereo and independently adjust their stereo width from a mono point to full stereo width. The result is an EQ which lets you pull out and tame notes in a piano part, bring up a buried crash in the drum overheads (or loop) and correct stereo imbalances in synths or simply put a whole new slant on a stereo picture. Corrective and creative, it's a real must-have.

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VERDICT 9.2



Lindell Audio 254E \$149

This is a remarkably accurate emulation of the Neve 2254 compressor limiter. I grew up using the hardware original as they were a staple of major UK studios in the '70s and '80s and that unique combination of an unforgiving, fat sounding limiter and the pumping power of the compressor made it a real favourite on drum busses, poking hard edged basses, and fat rhythm guitars. Back it off a bit and it goes more transparent and, with the limiter just holding the peaks, the highs come through putting a real sheen on the sound while adding some solid energy. The 254E does exactly that. When cranked it is highly coloured and works well directly on the sound (or buss) and has an advantage over the original as there is a mix control. Used subtly it will smooth out a signal while adding warmth and depth. A compressor with character, and a great one at that.

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VERDICT 8.5



Lindell Audio 6X-500 \$99

This is a pretty faithful emulation of the Lindell hardware of the same number which is essentially a simple channel strip with a few excellent extras. With its separate input and output levels you can push the input to the point of distortion. It never gets savage but it does get fat and warm, which is very useful on drums or slightly harsh sounding acoustic instruments.

There are high and low shelving EQs, which sound smooth and powerful and work on three fixed frequencies (LF: 100, 60, 30Hz, HF: 16, 10, 6kHz). Think of them as great sounding tone controls and do your surgical work elsewhere. The filters are quite stunning. With five slopes ranging from 6 to 36dB/oct and 20Hz to 20kHz ranges you get great tone shaping through to a savage narrowing of the frequency spectrum. Great on anything but particularly useful in electronic music. Don't be fooled by its apparent simplicity – it's powerful.

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VERDICT 7.8



Lindell Audio PEX-500 \$99

This is an emulation of Lindell's transistorised hardware emulation of the classic valve Pultec PEQ... The Pultec is renowned for its sweet but powerful high-end enhancement and its solid fat bass. The Lindell hardware goes a long way to giving those sweet sounding curves in a transistorised (and massively cheaper) form. This emulation gives you pretty much exactly that. The dual abilities to add crazy amounts of delicious smooth high-end without harshness and deep bass without it sounding boomy are here in spades, and you can still do the old trick of adding and subtracting simultaneously in the LF for that semi-parametric effect beloved of many Reggae producers. In addition there is a mid/side facility which allows you to have two completely different settings across a stereo image. The Pultec has always been the ultimate tone control and the PEX-500 delivers a lot of those goods without the hefty price tag.

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VERDICT 8.2



Lindell Audio 7X-500 \$99

Once again it's a software version of a Lindell hardware emulation, this time of the classic Urei 1176. You would expect that real FET slap and you get it. While there is a smaller spread of ratios than in the original (4:1, 12:1 and 100:1), they have been wisely chosen and for attack and decay you get two options, either three-way switches (short, medium and fast) or the classic continuous pots. With the pots you can really get into that incredible transient shaping and groove manipulation of the original, with a bit of added control as it includes a sidechain filter (off, 100Hz, 300Hz). But the icing on the cake is that you can unlink when used in stereo, in effect giving you two mono compressors, or when linked you have the option of a continuous percentage of linkage. Great when you want a bit less control of the stereo image.

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VERDICT 8.9



Lindell Audio Channel X Bundle \$249

This bundle gives you the 7X-500, PEX-500 and 6X-500 individually, plus Channel X – not something in the high numbers on your Freeview box but the three plugs combined. It's quite a channel strip with plenty of filtering, EQ and pre-pushing overloads, plus you can put the three units in any order which adds massively to the tonal variations available. A great value way to get your hands on all three plugs with an added and very useful bonus.

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VERDICT 9.2



ACME Audio Opticom XLA-3 \$299

The XLA-3 has optical circuitry with three compression responses that treat sounds in totally different ways, each of them highly usable. Add to that the ability to push the input into focused harmonic colouring and beyond into powerful sounding distortion, and you have a compressor/limiter capable of everything from subtle warming of a signal to full-on cranked mayhem. The emulation sounds fantastic, adding colour and texture. You can unlink it in stereo, plus there is a mix control. Like the original you can also use it just as an amp without the compression circuit. Every DAW set-up needs at least one compressor that inhabits this world, and this is one of the best we have ever tried.

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VERDICT 9.8