

GIG Magazine, November 1997 BlueMAX

By Jamie Rio



I have always suffered, somewhat, from compressor/limited phobia. Just take a look at your average compressor/limiter-- it has a lot of knobs, you must have a knowledge of the relationship between threshold, ratio, attack and release, and you have to remember what knob does what. And, when you have adjusted everything just right, you are not supposed to be able to tell its working. Well, PreSonus has developed a compressor/limiter that has cured my phobia.

The BlueMAX is what PreSonus calls a smart compressor/limiter. Smart, because it has 15 selectable presets that cover vocals, percussion, acoustic guitars, electric guitars and basses, keyboards, stereo processing and special effects. There is also a manual setting in the event you wish to create your own parameters.

The BlueMAX looks like your average compressor/limiter. It's one rack space tall and half a rack space wide, it can be run in stereo or mono, there are separate variable input and output controls, full metering for input and output as well as gain reduction and, of course, there are the ratio, attack and release controls for use in manual mode. There is also a process bypass button which makes it convenient to A/B the difference between the processed/unprocessed signal. Very importantly, there is an internal power supply, which means no wall wart. I was fortunate enough to have use of the BlueMAX for a couple of weeks. This gave me a chance to try out the many features. My first outing was a club date where I supplied my own sound system. I simply ran the main output and monitor output of my mixer (both mono) into the left and right sides of the BlueMAX. I was running only vocals through the PA so I was looking for slight compression and not too much limiting. The user's manual recommended vocal preset 1 as "good for live vocals". It was actually great for live vocals. The compression gave our voices improved presence and the limiting was almost unnoticeable while still keeping the lid on things when we hit some loud

three-part harmonies. A couple of times during the show I switched the BlueMAX to manual mode and attempted to improve the factory presets. It seems as though the techs at PreSonus spent quite a bit of time perfecting their factory settings and I couldn't get the vocals to sound any better with my own adjustments.

At a show the following week I ran my 12-string acoustic guitar through the BlueMAX and was very pleased with the results. Very often when you add an acoustic guitar to a rock band the acoustic gets lost in the mix, especially with the many overtones of a 12-string acoustic guitar. With the help of the BlueMAX it was a piece of cake getting the 12-string to fit in the mix. Once again, I tried my own settings in the manual mode but found that the factory preset seemed a little sweeter.

The one incident where I felt the manual controls worked better than the presets was with my electric guitar. I got all the presence and punch I needed out of the BlueMAX. It just takes longer in the manual mode. I was surprised to discover that no one else is making an inexpensive compressor/limiter with factory presets. It's something working musicians certainly need. PreSonus has removed all of the intimidating aspects of a compressor/limiter and given us a quality, user-friendly piece of gear.