



Stuck on the tube

Wes Maebe puts the Analogue Tube AT-101 through the paces on a new track by guitarist Elliott Randall...

ANALOGUE TUBE AT-101

Valve Power! This box is going to knock your audio sox off. You're going to listen to it and try it out and you are not going to want to give it back.

HOW I MET THIS GEM

Simon Saywood's Analogue Tube first caught my attention at the AES in San Francisco last year. We were putting the APRS stand together in the UK Village and across from us, Simon turned up with the biggest Peli Case I'd ever seen. Out came what I thought was a very new looking 670.

Gear sluts that we engineers are, we all rushed over and got introduced to the stunning AT-101.

THE TECHIE BIT

Based entirely on the original Fairchild 670, the AT-101 took about four years to develop. The unit uses point-to-point wiring throughout, the audio path is free from printed circuit boards and it has been entirely made by hand.

JJ Electronics helped Analogue Tube develop a new generation 6386 remote cut-off triode tube, of which there are eight in the unit. The front panel looks exactly like the original, except for the Lat/Vert markings, which have been replaced by a Stereo Link switch.

Coming back to the tubes, the AT-101 has 20 tubes in total, so needless to say that this beast needs to be in a well vented area. My test unit came with a 1U low noise three-fan unit to cool things down, but it didn't manage to cool down my enthusiasm.

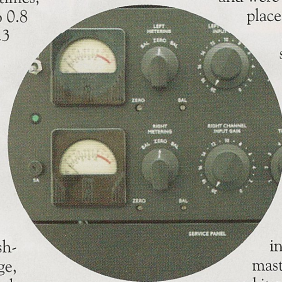
The AT-101 gives you a plethora of attack and release times, ranging from 0.2 to 0.8 milliseconds and 0.3 to 25 seconds respectively.

The compression/limiting ratio ranges from 1:1 up to 1:20 and because the AT-101 employs a gain reduction amplifier and a push-pull amplifying stage, producing a high voltage side chain controlling the gain reduction, for each channel, you never get any of those annoying thumbs or pops.

THE REAL WORLD

Elliott Randall drafted me in to mix one of his tracks at my studio, The Sonic Cuisine. We set up the AT-101 on the SSL X-Desk inserts to process electric guitar and bass.

I drove both channels quite hard. A lot harder than I usually would with an original 670, which could be down to the DC threshold. The result was instant smoothness, an extremely nice round bottom end without sounding squashed. The instruments, recorded in the digital domain, sounded sweeter and were much easier to place in the mix.



As this particular song is quite a soft track, we wanted to throw a few more different mixes at the AT-101 and see how it behaved with more rocky material.

I linked the unit into my usual mastering chain and used it as the front end compressor on four of Elliott Randall's songs. All four from different studios, recorded in different formats and all pretty different in terms of programme material, giving me the opportunity to thoroughly use all of the AT-101's features. Whatever you put through this work of art, you end up with a fuller, smoother lower end and an old-fashioned quality combined with a fresh and modern clarity.

As long as I had this unit on loan, I was going to take advantage of it.

When The Love Express, a house and techno production duo, came to The Sonic Cuisine to have their *Love Express* track mixed, the AT-101 got put through its paces once more.

Given the nature of this track, I really wanted to see how aggressive you can get with the unit. The analogue synth bass was perfect for this and, I have to say, the unit did not disappoint. Its usual qualities came to the forefront and we ended up with a richness reminiscent of going to tape.

TO RACK OR NOT TO RACK?

A piece of equipment that's been developed and built with so much care and passion just has to be good. The AT-101 is more than good - it is stunning. Whatever you put through it comes back sounding nicer. You can use it to control material, to gently tweak it or to drastically shape a sound.

This unit is a faithful reconstruction of an old-school favourite with added crispness. If I had to pigeonhole the AT-101, I would call it Simon Saywood's Acoustical Force Field I really didn't want to give this one back, but I had to.

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