Summit Audio MPC-100A

The all-American MPC-100A is a prestige valve mic unit that functions as preamplifier, compressor and limiter, and its powerful enough to make your eyes water, TERRY NELSON shuns the bargepole to discover its true virtues



THE MPC-100A Mic Processor is and sends the signal straight to the brushed-silver front panel.

either final output level or gain reduction. frequency range. say comprehensive preamplifier as it features separate microphone (with THE COMP-LIMITER section phase reverse and -20dB pad switches.

In a departure from the vintage-style attack and release. black knobs, the stepped-gain attenuation In the simplest mode, setting a high both best be described as 'forward' with want. background you might be surprised.

dependent on the choice of microphone. version. The soft clipping characteristics of valves In use, the 100A is a forgiving can often be very desirable compared to compressor—a property that seems to be the crunch of most solid-state circuitry however, and with the overload LED blinking on peaks, the 100A remains very but there is none of the associated natural with, perhaps, a bit of warmth.

panel jack bypasses the input transformer fast, medium, and slow, giving very

the latest in a prestige line of valve preamp input, overriding the mic and line outboard from the American Summit Audio, inputs. The gain attenuator features a blue being a combined valve preamplifier, shaded region covering seven steps and compressor, and limiter. The unit follows this refers to the hi-Z input. The 100A also the standard Summit presentation of a offers fine-tuning of tone via the LOADING 2U-high rack chassis with a stylish, retro, control. This varies the input impedance from $10K\Omega$ to $1M\Omega$, and while it will not The MPC-100A's functions divide into make your Strat into a Les Paul—or vice comprehensive preamplifier and limiter- versa—it does provide a lot of versatility. compressor, with a vu meter showing Increasing the loading widens the

switchable 48V phantom) and line inputs features traditional black knobs for input on XLRs, plus a front panel hi-Z jack for DI gain together with an overload LED, use. The mic-line inputs are switchable, threshold (what Summit calls AC and this allows you to have both plugged Threshold), Slope (or ratio, variable from up simultaneously. In addition, there are 1:1 to 1:10) and output level. In addition, there are 3-position switches for setting

control uses a large red one, with a threshold and 1:1 ratio will give no smaller version for the LOADING control for compression, but offer a lot of flexibility the DI input. The 12 gain positions with the input and output gain controls. For provided more than adequate range for instance, if you want a saturated sound condenser and dynamic either with the preamp or the compressor microphones, and preamplifier noise was section or both—juggling these controls noticeable by its absence. The sound can may well elicit the characteristic that you

signals remaining Turning the AC THRESHOLD control unobtrusive. I mention this because in a counterclockwise lowers the threshold recent comparison made between some and increasing the SLOPE control will very high quality preamps using the same cause the compressor to kick in. When microphone and position, it was surprising I tried the prototype MPC-100A at the how much the sound image around the AES Convention in Copenhagen, the microphone varied. If you think this is range of these controls was immediately going too much into the esoteric world, apparent. Since then Summit has refined things, and though the range is still there, Valve mic preamps are almost the effect has become somewhat invariably expected to deliver a warm smoother. Given the probable uses of the sound, but I would suggest that achieving unit, this is probably the right move, but I the stereotypical valve 'warmth' is equally did like the 'bite' offered in the earlier

a Summit trademark. You can see on the meter that it is compressing quite heavily, 'squashing' or flattening of the sound. The The hi-Z DI input makes the 100A attack and release settings have also useful as a DI box. Plugging into the front been very well chosen: flipping between,

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noticeable changes.

Apart from the mains toggle switch, there are switches for output-gain reduction for the meter, and a 3-position switch for putting the compressor in or out of circuit and stereo link. This switch allows you to use just the preamp section by itself if required. Again, a handy feature.

With the exception of the hi-Z input, all connectors are on the back of the chassis and, apart from the mic and line XLR's, also include a balanced jack input to the side chain for external control signals, a mono jack input for stereo linking, a 10dB output on unbalanced jack and a +4dB output on XLR.

I tried the MPC-100A with a variety of microphones (EV RE2000, Calrec condenser, EV N-D757 dynamic), and a selection of instruments (Fender Strat, Ibanez JEM Steve Vai Fender VI bass), plus a wide selection of recorded material. In all cases, the range of processing and-or effects was remarkable. If Summit was looking to make a handy 'audio toolbox' they have certainly succeeded.

On the downside, I must confess I don't quite understand Pin 3 being hot, considering all the fuss made over recent years for Pin 2. Maybe this could be changed internally on links. I would also have liked to see a side-chain send-return function rather than just side chain in—this would make things like de-essing easier by being able to plug in an EQ easily without Y-ing the signal.

Summit obviously assumes that you are either going to use the MPC-100A with or without the compressor section as switching the latter in or out could change the output level (you may not be able to A-B in or out with the same level). The input gain to the compressor can be adjusted to give this, but it may not necessarily be the amount of drive that you wanted.

I must admit that I did have some fun at the end by putting both sections into total saturation with heavy compression, and if you want to get some raunchy guitar sounds onto tape that don't sound too much like a DI, then this is the box for you. However, this should not overshadow the subtleties of the unit and I thoroughly recommend the MPC-100A for a variety of applications.

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