EqMag.com >> This Month >> Api A2d

- Giveaways
- Events
- Subscribe
- Back Issues
- Advertise
- Classifieds
- Newsletters
- Product Spotlight
- Demo Room
- Links

Yes, they shrunk the API sound into that little box

API A2D

By Jeff Anderson | September, 2006

API is marketing their new A2D as "ear candy" — and that slogan nails it. The A2D contains a pair of preamps for raising mic-level signals to workable line levels. These preamps feed analog XLR outs, as well as a digital converter, which provides AES and S/PDIF digital outs (this is the first API device with digital outs). The A2D handles all common samples rates from 44.1 to 192kHz.

Images

Click on the Images

Fig. 1

The 24-bit converters have discrete analog op amps on the front end, and there are two level controls to adjust the digital output volume. These controls have come in very handy during my mixing sessions; you can control the amount of signal running through the unit, which affects the overall tone, as well as the amount of signal leaving the unit.

The A2D can run from an external clock source via SuperClock, accepted from a BNC cable; a front panel light indicates an external sync source. By using a 9-pin D-sub connection, you can even link multiple A2D units together so that they all run off of the first clock in the chain. (At our studio, we slaved the A2D unit up with an Apogee Big Ben, so every digital piece in our studio was running from the same clock source.)

Normally, I wouldn't take the space to gives props to meters, however the 20-segment LED meters on the front panel are incredibly vibrant. There are two complete sets of meters; on the input side they range from –30dB to +27dB. On the digital side, they display –56dB to 0dB. Even if you are using the unit as an analog preamp, the digital meters indicate the current levels.

APPLYING THE API

After using the A2D for both tracking and mixing, I couldn't help but notice how clean and warm the sound was. The 312 mic preamps are the same used in API consoles, as well as their 3124 quad mic preamp. As you raise the input level, you can hear the transformer saturating — a huge part of that glorious, classic API sound.

On the analog side, this unit covers all the bases. Over the past few months, we've used it on everything from bass, vocals, guitars, overheads and even keyboards at line level. It has XLR analog ins and outs for each channel on the back of the unit, and line level TRS (balanced) high impedance inputs on the front. Additionally, the back has balanced TRS inserts before the A/D converter. These allow inserting analog processors into the analog chain prior to conversion; an obvious application is a limiter to prevent overloading the converters.

You can handle pretty much any signal, as there are switches for polarity, phantom power, a –20dB input pad, and mic/line select. An additional 2:1 transformer switch provides –10dB of attenuation by selecting a different tap of the preamp output transformer. By attenuating the output with this switch, you can "hit the unit harder" or pass more signal through the A2D to get more color, yet still be able to turn down the preamp output so that you have a manageable line level signal to send to your recorder.

One other nice feature: During my mixing sessions, I've been sending our console's analog signal to the A2D, and then using the AES port to send the digital out to an Alesis MasterLink. Thanks to the A2D's volume trims, it's possible to control both the left and right levels going to the MasterLink ins.

CONCLUSIONS

Last month, I used the A2D on quite a few sessions. When overdubbing, I routed the signal straight from the mic, to the A2D, then digitally through an XLR cable into our DAW's AES port, bypassing the console. The presence of an API was very apparent. I usually prefer to hit gear hard to get the most color out of it, so the 2:1 transformer routing switch rocks! By attenuating the levels at both the input (pad) and output, you can really hear the saturation and color that the A2D adds to your sound. This unit is extremely quiet, but even when you're running it hard, the sound remains noise-free, pristine, and full of color.

The A2D is so versatile and has so many features that relate to so many applications, I consider it an exceptional value. Personally, I feel getting "that API sound" alone is worth the cost — especially because it works in an all-analog or analog in/digital out context. We even used the A2D as in insert from our analog console on a vocal track as an effect to "jam it out" and get that API sound. It makes a great front end for your DAW, thanks to clean analog engineering and solid digital conversion — and more importantly, because it sounds crisp, clean, warm, and fat. That little rack box really does contain the famous API sound.

Product type: Rackmount stereo preamp with digital and analog outputs.

Target market: Higher-end studio and stage applications.

Strengths: Can color the sound in a very desirable way. Lots of interfacing options. Gives the "API sound" at a lower price point.

Limitations: No significant

limitations.

Price: $1,995

Contact: www.apiaudio.com