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## API The Box Analog Recording and Mixing Console, Manley Core Channel Strip and Pearl Priority Condenser Microphone

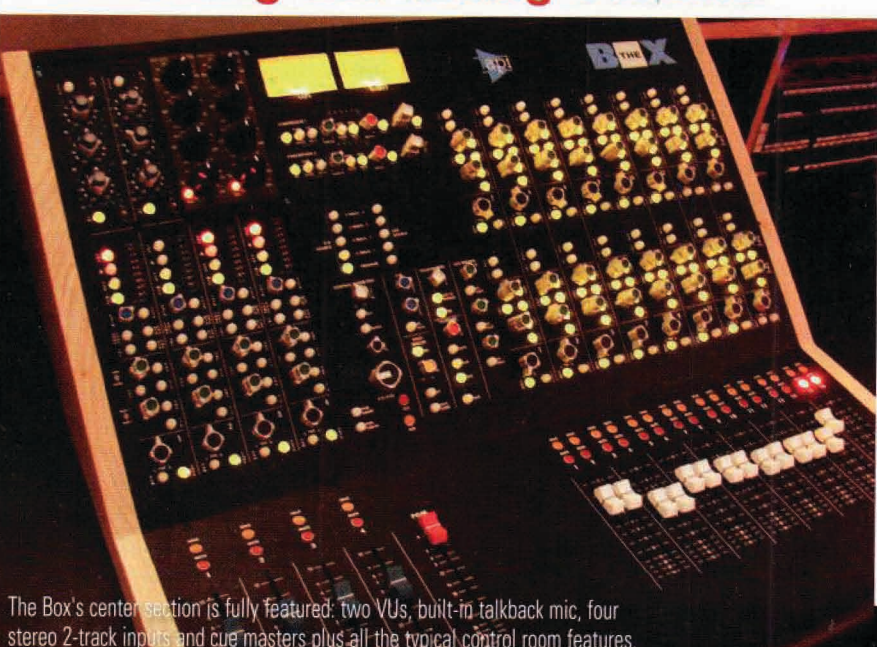
Everybody's been saying, "business is up," and optimism abounds as we approach a new year and new opportunities. The market is good, but there are hungry competitors seeking to grab your business and their stuff sounds great, too. If you're looking to command your clients' attention, here are three investments that are sure to impress while attaining a tone that is anything but typical.

### API The Box Analog Recording and Mixing Console

Many of us are quite happy with the digital mixers included as part of our DAWs, but some stubborn holdouts still insist on the tone, texture and soundstage of an analog mixing board. It's a nice option to have, no doubt. Yet the size, maintenance and redundancy of all those controls also found in a DAW are enough to ward off many potential desk owners. API's solution to this dilemma is The Box, a compact analog console that sticks to the heart of the matter: analog recording and mixing without frills or frailty.

#### Features

Think of The Box as a classic API mixer without any of the features that can be most effectively handled in your DAW. It starts with four input channels housing four API mic pres [API 3324], two channels of four band EQ [API 550A], two open



The Box's center section is fully featured: two VUs, built-in talkback mic, four stereo 2-track inputs and cue masters plus all the typical control room features.

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500 Series slots and all the routing/patch-point options users will most often desire. These four channels are also routable to the L/R mix, just like the 16 channels of DAW-returned analog summing. Other features include full-size faders, pan controls, mutes, solos and a fader defeat switch [making 16 channels of summing at precise unity gain very easy]. These channels [along with the first four] also provide cue sends, one stereo/two mono that allow pre/post routing; panning, and talent cue mixes or aux sends [the first four channels act as two stereo returns].

The center section is fully featured with two VUs, a built-in talkback mic and array of controls, four stereo 2-track inputs [with additive monitoring at unity gain], cue masters and all the typical control room features [main/alt monitors, dimming, mono sum]. This section also houses two channels of API 527 compression, routable to the input channels or the L/R mix bus. Like the mic pres, these comps are the real deal with API's Thrust circuit [sidechain HPF], old or new topologies [either feed-back or feed-forward] ratio, attack and release. The only thing missing is make-up gain.

The back panel squeezes a lot of connections into a small space with two DB25s for DAW returns, insert points [quarter-inch TRS sends and returns], mic/line inputs, cue sends [via DB25], monitor outputs [via XLR] and numerous I/O for those four input channels. There's a headphone output on both back and front.

Let's also point out what's not here, as that helps indicate The Box's purpose: there's no EQ [other than the two 550s], no effects returns, no subgroups, no surround mixing and—perhaps most importantly—no DAW controls, no video monitor or touchscreen, no data faders, and no MIDI. As such, The Box is a mixer designed for very specific applications.

#### In Use

Let's not waste valuable time debating the merits of API's audio quality; API tone—derived largely from their proprietary op amps—is widely respected, favored and known as punchy, clean, clear and dynamic. It's admired by engineers of all types and coveted by those working on rock 'n' roll.

### API's "In The Box" Contest Winner

In a joint effort between PAR-Tube—*Pro Audio Review's* online video initiative—and API, our readers were asked to submit music for re-mixing in The Box, getting a chance to blind-compare their in-the-DAW mix with The Box's re-mix and win an API 500 Series module for their efforts.

We received great sounding submissions covering rock, power-pop, jazz and EDM, but Ricardo Fernandes (of Dynamix Studio in Lisbon, Portugal) and his hard-rocking production of Sabino's "Not the End" was picked as our winner (due to its clarity, balance, punch and stereo imaging). Fernandes submitted eight stereo stems that, when summed at unity gain, recreated an ITB DAW mix. I created two mixes (one ITB DAW, one via The Box), volume matched them and sent them to Ricardo for inspection.

I narrowly preferred the mix from The Box due to its depth of soundstage, satisfying low-mids, "completed and sculpted" bottom end and overall "largeness" of the imaging, even if the DAW mix seemed to have even more side-to-side separation and a little more tightness to its punch.

Ricardo (also the guitarist on the track) picked the API mix too. Here's his reasoning: "The differences are mostly with the body and fullness of the midrange so typical with the API sound. You can really tell the differences in the punch of the snare, fullness of the bass and beefiness of the distorted guitars. There is something about API with distorted guitars that I love. I also felt that the front-to-back resolution was better and there was more separation between all the elements."

Visit the PAR SoundCloud to listen to the examples yourself...  
<https://soundcloud.com/pro-audio-review-magazine>

Thanks to everyone who submitted MP3s for consideration, as the general quality of the group was quite impressive. Stay tuned to PAR-Tube for more interactive, reader-involved, manufacturer-supported efforts in audio comparison and evaluations.

To my ears, the mic amps, 500 Series EQs, 527 compressor, and summing comprehensively sound "Classic API," uncompromised and as expected.

I've recently moved from a customized Soundcraft Ghost mixer to an analog summing device. Putting The Box in my signal path brought me the best sonics and mixes I've experienced yet. My rock, country and pop clients all loved The Box sound and readily approved their mixes. The only clients who didn't choose The Box for their mixes were the metal guys; they generally preferred the stark soundstage and faster punch of digital, ITB DAW mixes.

I also had a number of tracking dates

using The Box to great success. The mic pres and the 527 compressor did wonderful things on kick, snare and overheads; the drummers all but drooled. The cue sends allowed me just what I needed: two mixes with one for the drummer with lots of click, all switched to pre-fader, with ample output from the headphone amp to drive the drummer's cans. I've used many big classic analog consoles for tracking (Harrison, Neve, etc.) and I lacked nary a thing with The Box.

#### Summary

I have no criticisms of build quality, design or implementation of The Box. The Box can't be everything for everybody, though; it fills a

niche as a DAW's best all-analog companion. If you need a mixer with more preamps, EQs and sends, API has the 1608. Maybe you expect DAW control and digital features [converters, clocking, digital I/O] in your mixer. If so, there are numerous options to satisfy that niche, too.

If you're looking for the depth and soundstage of analog mixing, the prestige and smooth ride of a real console and the sonics of classic API mic amps and processors, consider The Box. A price of

\$18,000 may seem like a lot at first—API does offer interest free, 36-month financing of about \$500 a month—but if you look at the cost of a premium 16-channel analog summing device, dual 500 Series EQs, dual API 527 compressors, four 3324 mic preamps and a extra few peripherals, The Box starts to look like a very good value for discriminating audio engineers preferring analog flavor.

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