

REC's 2016 Holiday Buyer's Guide

Real reviews of useful recording products to fit any budget

Reviews by Mike Metlay, Paul Vnuk Jr., Darwin Grosse, Gary Eskow, and Salo Loyo

API 512v

\$995; www.apiaudio.com

Arguably the 512 from API (Automated Processes, Inc.) is one of the most-used, recognizable, and downright famous microphone preamps in history. The sound of all current 212/312/512 API preamps dates back over 40 years to Saul Walker's original designs. (Sadly, Saul passed away just a few days prior to my writing this review.)

I am very familiar with the API sound, having used the 512c many times and reviewed this circuit in many forms: the A2D 2-channel preamp/digital interface in November 2012, The Box mixer with four channels of API pres on board in September 2014, and the API Channel Strip in July 2015.

All three of the company's 200, 300, and 500 Series preamps, despite minor design differences, yield a similar and well-known sound that is clean, punchy and rich. The most popular current API preamp is the abovementioned 512c, designed for use in the company's 500 Series line of enclosures, which Saul Walker also invented.

The just-launched 512v Discrete Mic / Line Pre is the 512c's new cousin. For all intents and purposes, the 512v is a 512c with an updated feature set and look, but the sound remains 100% the same. API was kind enough to send me both a 512c and a 512v, and when set the same way, the two models are indistinguishable and interchangeable, even for stereo use.

The 512v includes all of the 512c's features, starting with a 65 dB input gain pot and 7-stage LED input metering. There are buttons for polarity invert, 48V phantom power, a -20 dB pad, and a choice of mic or line input.

Visually the new look of the 512v nods toward the 535-LA (reviewed in June 2016) with backlit buttons in white and red. Like the 512c, it offers a front panel choice of XLR or 1/4" instrument/line input, but via a Neutrik Combo XLR/TRS jack rather than separate inputs.

The two new features of the 512v are the addition of a semi-stepped variable output level control and a transformer tap switch with a ratio of 3:1. In use this makes the 512v an even more versatile choice than the 512c. The 512c is a a loud preamp with tons of clean gain, and typically I find myself padding the signal down 20 dB when using it with most modern condenser mics. In the 512v, there is plenty of room for fine level adjustment in between padded and unpadded. This is handy when using the 512v in front of many modern DAW interfaces to set appropriate levels.

This, along with the 3:1 transformer switch, also allows the 512v to act as a saturation device similar to the 535-LA. You can instantly add weight and thickness to the sound, which also gently reins in the highs. You can also push the input signal hot into the preamp and then back off the gain for grit and even fuzz tones.

These features do add extra cost over the 512c, but they take the 512 architecture to a more controllable and sonically versatile level for modern studio usage. As for the sound... it's API, no need to say more!—PV

