

USER REPORT

Aphex Upgrades 2020 to MkIII

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MILWAUKEE Last year I wrote a User Report on the Aphex Model 2020 MkII. I was impressed with that model's improvements over the original 2020, so I was not really expecting that much difference when I tried out the new MkIII. How much improvement could there be on something that I think is already quite good?

All the iterations of the 2020 are digitally controlled analog processors. This facilitates precise, repeatable and remote control without significant audio delay through the system.

This is a complete processing system including leveler, multiband compressor, split band limiter and HF limiter. This isn't just a collection of independent functions in one box - the digital control system adjusts a function depending on what may be happening in another function.

The excellent stereo generator and digital I/O are optional so that the unit is configurable for any situation. The remote control software is intuitive and easy to use (also improved).

The original 2020 has a big, clean sound although with some dynamic "quirks". The MkII kept that cleanliness and openness while solving the quirks. For all but aggressive formats, I felt that there was sufficient loudness. While main-

taining fidelity to the source, the MkII could set up to operate without the fatiguing distortion generated by other popular processors.

Different is good

The differences from the MkII to the MkIII are primarily in the HF limiter section. According to Aphex, the filters in the split band limiter in the MkII are not very steep. This creates the possibility of overshoots in the frequency region of the crossover. If pushed by heavy processing, especially on sibilant material, those overshoots hit the final clipper too hard.

The MkIII has redesigned filters so that the skirts are much steeper and the combined output of the two filters still generates a perfect pre-emphasis curve.

The MkII has opto-isolators as the gain element in the HF limiter, while in the MkIII they have been replaced by the Aphex's proprietary VCA1001 so that the attack time could be sped up. There are some minor changes to the flat limiter and to the software.

The biggest change in setting up the MkIII is that the Density can be increased.

My first installation was an upgrade. Our local engineer installed the new HF

limiter board, a new PROM, changed 12 same-value resistors (supplied) on the limiter board and installed the new software.

Our first impression was that the high end was much sweeter and clean, while easily maintaining openness and gaining loudness. We were surprised that it was so audible. There is so much more high frequency content that I had the sense

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there was an Aural Exciter circuit put in. (Aphex says no).

The DJ came in asking about what we had done. He commented that he had never heard himself sound so good on the air. Others later had the same comment. This installation uses the stereo generator option with a composite STL.

The second install was a new unit at an aggressive contemporary station. Unlike previous versions, the MkIII can be pushed hard and match the loudness of others while being punchy and clean through the high end.

When pushed really hard, distortion comes on in the midrange. I could not

make the high end splatter under any condition. The threshold for the onset of distortion seems to be the same for both dry voice and music.

This is a good thing because you don't sacrifice the loudness of one for the clarity of the other. Loudness-robbing overshoots are gone. The new density and brightness controls are effective and intuitive. This installation uses the AES/EBU output option directly into the exciter.

There were no drawbacks or compromises that I could hear from the switch from the MkII to the MkIII. The sound was simply more impressive and the unit could be pushed to be louder and thicker but still not be annoying.

My recommendation is that anyone who has an original 2020 should definitely get the unit upgraded to a MkIII.

Anyone who has a MkII and wants even more loudness and a sweeter high end should get it upgraded. And anyone who has been wanting to get away from sounding just like everyone else on the dial - that 'radio' sound - should at least try a MkIII.

The price of the unit is \$5,500 for the basic unit (flat processing), \$500 for the digital I/O, \$500 for the HF limiter and \$2,500 for the HF limiter and stereo generator. Upgrading a 2020 to a MkIII costs \$1,250.

For more information contact Aphex in California at (818) 767-2929 or visit www.aphex.com.