



Presonus ADL 700

It's been a while since the union of ADL and Presonus last produced an offspring but the new channel strip has characteristics of both parents and a similarity to its sibling.

GEORGE SHILLING appraises the family values.

Anthony DeMaria has a successful business with a collection of lovingly crafted boutique outboard, but this new unit is the fruit of an ongoing partnership with Presonus, a company better known for its dominance at a lower end of the market. I previously looked at the first result of this pairing more than six years ago, as the ADL 600 dual preamplifier (*Resolution* V5.7). This new unit is an all-encompassing recording channel.

First impressions are very good. The build of the 2U is chunky yet refined. The ADL 700 (UK£1665 + VAT) includes the kind of Class A tube circuitry (with transformer balanced input and output) you normally find only in boutique hand-constructed designs. But the expertise of the mass producing Presonus has provided a very solid construction, with a thick, contoured front panel bearing nicely damped knobs, positive but not overly stiff switched rotary controls, and a remarkable eleven chunky toggle switches; most are accompanied by blue LED indicators. The meter bezel is thick, with the glass recessed more than is common, making it less vulnerable to knocks. The case is deep and heavy, and although extensively vented there is plenty of structural reinforcement with no hint of any possibility of bowing.

The rear is a simple panel with separate XLRs for Mic and Line input, and Line Output. A mini-connector on the circuit board for direct output from the preamp is not used. On the rear there is also a TRS jack socket that can be connected to another ADL 700 for stereo operation. The preamp is a tube design similar to those in the ADL 600, with a pair of Russian Electro Harmonix 6922 valves and a JJ brand ECC81. This feeds a FET compressor and a 4-band semi-parametric EQ. The power supply section is behind internal steel partitions, with a number of transistors mounted against thick metal heatsinks — this is serious stuff.

Flipping the Power toggle lights a large blue light and the handsome meter illuminates. The first knob top-left on the panel is a High Pass Filter. The manual implies that it is switched but in fact it is a pot, going from Off through 20Hz up to 200Hz. The scaling is wide at the lowest frequencies, which is excellent for fine-tuning to remove the lowest rumbles, and it is useful to have this amount of control.

The input selector chooses between front panel Instrument, rear XLR Line and Mic inputs with the last of these switchable between four different impedance settings from 1500 down to 150ohms, although frankly with most mics the difference is subtle. Apart from a very slightly thinner sound

the most noticeable difference is less gain at lower impedances. Gain is in 5dB steps from 30 to 65dB, and there is a +/-10dB trim with no scale legending at all — I'd have preferred some lines or marks for reference. Three of the aforementioned toggles are assigned to Polarity, 48V phantom, and a useful -20dB Pad. For a valve preamp this is a beautifully clean and clear sounding path with bags of headroom.

The compressor controls comprise Threshold, Attack and Release (both uncalibrated and continuously variable between Fast and Slow), and Ratio, which ranges from 1:1 continuously up to 4:1. There is also a Gain make-up knob that adds up to 18dB. Turning the Threshold knob fully counter-clockwise reaches a Click and Stereo link mode is engaged. This slaves the unit to a master (via the rear jack) and in this mode control is ceded to the master with only the Gain knob remaining active.

A toggle bypasses the compressor, and under the meter are toggles for -6dB meter display, and gain reduction or output level metering. On first use I misread the Ratio scale and wondered why the compression seemed so benign, despite some meter waggling. Where one might expect to find a ratio of 3:1, on this knob you get 1.3:1, and you have to go more than half way round to achieve 2:1. It seems odd that the maximum setting here is the same as the minimum setting on the world's favourite FET compressor, the 1176. However, with the ratio set between 3:1 and 4:1 I finally achieved a lovely juicy and musical compression on very dynamic female vocals with the Attack and Release set around the middle of their scales. There was little need to ride gain even with extremes of performance volume. Inserted across drum ambience, you can happily achieve that super crushed room sound. With the Attack and Release set fastest and with the Threshold right down, the maximum 4:1 Ratio is just adequate to achieve this.

The EQ section follows, although this can be placed in circuit before the compressor with one of the toggle switches. All four bands provide +/-16dB with a centre detent at variable frequencies. The bands overlap considerably. The high and low bands can be switched from shelving to Peak, where like the inner bands they have a fixed Q of 0.6. Adding about 3dB high shelf at 16kHz gave my female singer a nice sparkle against a busy track, without sounding harsh. The EQ is smooth and refined, perhaps not quite as posh as the Charter Oak PEQ-1 or Gyraf GXIV, but certainly heading that way. It is more than powerful enough for general use, but is pretty forgiving, and

the low end can be huge (without woolliness) in Peak mode, where combining the HPF is effective (although EQ bypass doesn't affect the HPF). Ducking a bit of middle end and sweeping around with either of the mid bands can smooth things nicely. Adding some bite with the high mid band works well for guitars and vocals without making things sound harsh. Far right there is finally a large Level fader knob, although this has no scale markings.

For a tube design, the ADL 700 has an incredible signal-to-noise ratio, and a huge dynamic range. Sonically it is perhaps not quite as gorgeously warm and characterful as boutique designs, such as those from Thermionic Culture, but instead straddles the gap between such units and super-clean and detailed sounding all-transistor designs. DeMaria was not responsible for the EQ and compressor designs, but nevertheless they work very well alongside this preamp.

The manual is clear and smart, with the bonus of helpful tutorial pages penned by Presonus boss Jim Odon with sound advice, perhaps aimed at less experienced users moving up from the lower budget offerings from Presonus. But this is a terrific too worthy of consideration by seasoned professionals too. It's a bit like the Lotus car company teaming up with Ford or Vauxhall to produce a supercar with the practicality of a family saloon. And the analogy is apt also because the ADL 700 lacks the legendarily attributed supercar idiosyncrasies: features occasionally encountered with boutique gear such as loose knobs, bendy case panels and unreliability — there's none of that here. It's solidly built, yet thoroughly refined and should prove a terrific all-rounder in any studio setup. ■

PROS Clean and musical ADL preamp; great sounding EQ and FET compression; solidly built.

CONS No barrel pointers on knobs; no scale indications for Gain and Level knobs.

EXTRAS The ADL 600 employs a Class A, discrete design with three valves per channel



operating with +/-300V rails. It has a high-pass filter and input gain on a rotary switch for over 73dB and the output stage has +/-10dB of trim.

Contact

PRESONUS, US
Web: www.presonus.com
UK, Source Distribution: +44 20 8962 5081