



Effectrode

PC-2A Photo-Optical Tube Compressor

Nick Wells auditions the latest offering from tube effects specialists Effectrode.

Love them or hate them, there remains a lot of hype surrounding the humble compressor, a phenomenon that effects scientist and head honcho at Effectrode, Phil Taylor, likens to the PR campaigns surrounding cosmetic products, such as anti-wrinkle cream. 'Are there any real measurable benefits from using that stuff?' Says Phil. 'Or are those manufacturers selling a dream? The same thing happens in the music industry. I aim to stick to the facts concerning the electronics and what my pedals actually do.'

The Effectrode PC-2A is a photo-optical compressor that's designed to offer studio-style compression via audiophile-grade components and a completely Class-A signal path. The design is driven by pro-audio equipment, as Phil explains: 'There's been a big movement to refine the old Japanese Ross compressor and I've spent quite a lot of time looking at big valve studio compressors like the Teletronix LA-2A.' Let's see how it handles.

Features

The PC-2A is a smart-looking pedal with four small holes on either side of its metal casing. It's centred around a 'new old stock' military-spec, subminiature 6021 valve. These compact tubes were originally developed for use as proximity fuses in artillery shells during the Second World War, as Phil explains: 'They were developed by the military and are quite robust because they're so small. They proved to be the transition between the last valve and the first transistor and in my experience they have more consistent gain parameters than early germanium transistors.' In order to run the valve at the proper high plate voltage, the pedal comes equipped with a 12 V DC mains adaptor and internally steps this up to 300V. The photo-optical gain reduction circuit was inspired by the LA-2A compressor and uses a light source, coupled with a photosensitive resistor, to control the compressor's attack and release times.

Despite its sophisticated

design, the PC-2A is very easy to use, with two basic control knobs, each with felt pads at their base, for peak reduction and gain, plus a limit mini switch that gives you two completely different compression ratios, one being much more subtle than the other. 'Some people like subtle compression and some like heavy compression,' says Phil. 'So I thought maybe I should have a go at putting both in one box.'

Sounds

The PC-2A delivers a musical and very natural-sounding compression. The sound quality is exceptional, and for all its inherent tube warmth this pedal can be equally as transparent. With such high input impedance there is very little loss of the low frequencies, so it doesn't suck on your tone, and with the peak reduction control set fairly low you get a very wide bottom end that's equivalent to plugging into a high-quality amp.

In practical terms, you don't need to restrict how you might play a certain line, so you can relax a bit more if you want to hit harder on the strings. The PC-2A is a godsend when plugging into a mixing desk or recording directly into a computer, when you need to set the level and get maximum signal without clipping or losing the wide dynamic range, particularly with an active bass. Increase the peak reduction control and the compression becomes more evident, though remains very musical, while

pushing the gain lends a useful boost to the overall output level. Shift the limit switch and the effect becomes even more obvious – perfect for those who prefer heavier kinds of compression.

Conclusion

In many respects the PC-2A should be thought of as a tool rather than an effect. To have this level of electronic wizardry and sophistication – more often associated with rack-mount studio units – in a pedal really is remarkable. Couple that with the attention to detail and the high-quality components, not to mention the ease at which it operates, and Effectrode are on to a sure winner. With compression being such a subjective topic, it can often be a bit of a minefield, but in our experience, they don't come much better than this.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

EFFECTRODE PC-2A

PRICE: £229

Built in: UK

Type: Optical valve compressor

Features: Peak reduction & gain controls, limit/compress switch, internal attack trim pot

Power: 12 V DC mains adaptor only (included)

Dimensions: 52(h) x 95(w) x 128(d) mm

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Premium components and we loved the versatility of the limit switch.

Minus: None.

Overall: A first-rate compressor pedal.

CONTACT DETAILS

Effectrode Audiophile Pedals

Tel: 01782 372210

www.effectrode.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING

★★★★★