

DAVelectronics Broadhurst Gardens No.3

With a name that summons up visions of potting compost among the ill-informed, this period piece draws instead on the glorious past of Decca's recording studios. Farmer **GEORGE SHILLING** grabs a couple of handfuls of wonderful No.3.

CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU might expect, DAVElectronics is not run by someone called Dave; instead the proprietor is one Mick Hinton and he was a maintenance and design engineer for Decca for some years until the closure of the studio facility in 1996. The Broadhurst Gardens range refers to the old address of Decca Studios (165 Broadhurst Gardens, West Hampstead, London).

While the BG1 and BG2 are microphone preamplifiers based on later Decca designs, and a BG4 is planned as a stereo mastering preamp, this unit is based on console EQs that were used in the Decca mastering rooms, and designed and built in-house around 1977. Mick claims that similar circuits to these were employed for most of the stereo mastering for vinyl, cassette and CD at the highly regarded Decca facilities.

The BG3 is a mastering EQ with all stepped/switched controls; there are no variable pots at all. The review unit had a slightly rough 'prototype' feel to it. Despite its industrial business-like construction, the metal 2U box feels very light. The rear features clearly labelled XLR sockets and an IEC socket for power. The front panel legending looks slightly amateurish, and cosmetics are apparently low on the priority list. A little more attention to panel layout might have been useful, as the controls are oddly spaced and initially slightly confusing. The legending is fairly poor and a little difficult to read, and the stiff knobs oddly stand proud of the case – especially the larger ones – with their securing nuts sitting on the surface of the case.

The two channels are set out one above the other with discrete controls for frequencies and cut/boost. Matching the channels is therefore easy, with the corresponding channel's knobs directly above or below.

First on each channel is a gain switching knob, which enables broad gain setting from -24dB to +6dB in 3dB steps. This is accompanied by a very tiny EQ in button with an associated LED, which I didn't even notice at first. Just next to this is a rudimentary meter with three LEDs. Green ones usefully show at +8 and +18dBu and a red one 8dB below clipping – so no need to panic then, just a sign that things are hotting up. The clipping level is quoted at an excellent +29dBu.

The unusual layout puts the Low then High Shelf bands adjacent to each other on the left hand side, followed by High then Low bell curve or 'Resonant' bands, with Filters at the far right, along with an illuminating power switch. The shelving bands feature cut/boost knobs with 1.5dB steps to +/-7.5dB.

Frequencies on the low band are at 50, 100, 200, 400 and 800Hz, while the top band is at 4, 8, 12, 16 and 32kHz. The two Resonant bands are similarly stepped. The High, which is adjacent to the High Resonant controls, has 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10kHz, while the Low band's frequency selector has positions for 30, 60, 120, 240 and 500Hz.

At the far right are filters; these are very powerful



yet smooth sounding. The Low Pass is set with a 36dB/octave slope at 10,12,14, 16 and 20kHz, while the High Pass has an 18dB/octave slope at 12.5, 25, 50 and 100Hz. When any filter is in, an additional LED lights on the channel. The knobs for the filters and the gain knobs on the Resonant bands are of a larger type, the Low Resonant band's Gain knob closer to the High Shelf frequency knob than its own associated frequency knob, which is confusing at first.

However, ergonomics aside, this is a tool for a mastering engineer where the user will soon become familiar with the controls in regular use. Quoted figures are exceptional: typical distortion of 0.001% at +20dBu output, and a frequency response of 10Hz – 150kHz +/-0.25dB. And it certainly sounds better than many more glamorous-looking units.

This is a precision mastering tool that gently sculpts and shapes the source in an extremely elegant manner. The character is neutral and detailed, and exceptionally clean and stable. Mastering is often thought of as something of a black art, but with an EQ as delightful as this enhancement is easy. This really is a case of 'it does what it says on the tin', with no unexpected quirks or colourations.

The Resonant bands pick out the chosen frequencies but never in a nasty or pointy manner. With no bandwidth or slope controls, there are more flexible units available. But for tweaking and compensating for tonal balance anomalies, this device is surprisingly powerful. Large boosts and cuts never sound clinical or unnatural, and I especially like the 32kHz boost, which really sparkles. And ranges of only +/-7.5dB are more than ample for most mastering applications.

The frequencies are well chosen, the Resonant frequency settings nicely complementing the Shelf frequencies, and it is often only when you bypass the EQ that you realise that you are making pretty substantial changes to the tone. By combining the frequency bands in an additive or subtractive manner, all sorts of possibilities open up. With all switched

controls, settings are easily noted and repeated.

If you are looking to impress clients, the appearance is unlikely to do that. However, if you are looking for a high-quality mastering tool, this is something of a find and well worth consideration. Many of London's top mastering houses are already DAV clients. ■

PROS Excellent mastering EQ; fixed repeatable switched controls; accurate settings; low noise and distortion.

CONS Perverse panel layout; unimpressive appearance.

EXTRAS The BG3 is, predictably, the third unit in the DAVElectronics range and the first with EQ. The original BG1 is a stereo mic



preamp while the BG2 is a 4-channel unit.



Both feature switchable Phantom power, phase reverse and three-position high pass filters.

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