

review

Gyraf Audio Gyratec X

This vari-mu compressor is the most expensive box in the Danish company's range but nothing looks like it or sounds like it.

GEORGE SHILLING finds he is smiling to himself and laughing out loud.

THIS GYRAF IS A VARI-MU stereo compressor using the same operational principle as the Fairchild 670 and Universal Audio 176. The compression is controlled by 'altering quiescent current in differential tube pairs' (I'll leave the explanation of that to John Watkinson!). The basic effect is a faster response than optical compression. However, it is also credited as being the reason why the sound of the Fairchild is so popular.

No matter how good you think the photos on this page look, I can tell you they are nothing compared to having the real thing in front of you. I can only describe the appearance as sex on a stick with bells on.

The front panel is dominated by a fabulous thick-rimmed circular meter dial. This is surely from Dr Frankenstein's laboratory, or some ancient Danish locomotive. Soon after power up, the needle starts to glide around towards full deflection, the last section taking several minutes to fully reach the top, resting around the highest number of 240, which is apparently completely arbitrary.

There is no backlight, but a Power On light glows at two different brightness intensities depending on



Bypass status. The other controls are similar to those found on the previously reviewed GIII (V2.2), albeit with slightly larger knobs, appropriate for the larger front panel on this imposing 3U device. The size is undoubtedly to accommodate the meter (see below).

The design principles faithfully follow those of other Gyraf units: only valves, passive components and transistors are used in the audio path, and only rotary controls grace the front panel. And Gyrafs all come with large rubber feet that unscrew easily.

Large Input and Output Gain knobs have a lightly detented, clicky feel, the other knobs are beautifully damped. Threshold and Ratio have Gyraf's usual exceptionally wide ranges, with either knob able to effectively bypass the compression, or in combination in the opposite direction, result in a huge gain reduction. The nature of these though is quite different from the GIII. This compressor seems to work in a more 'absorbent' and invisible way.

This is one of those pieces of gear that quickly puts a smile on your face. Strapped across the mix bus of an 'in-progress' mix, it soon had me grinning and laughing out loud, such was the delightful quality of the compression (*That'll be those bells of yours. Ed*). This machine definitely lives up to its name, having that special 'X factor'.

This is surely the best attempt yet at a modern replacement for the legendary Fairchild 670. However, with a subtle character all its own and with far more flexible control, it is a real delight to use on all kinds of sources.

I enjoyed having it in circuit for every overdub: sax, acoustic piano, drums, guitars, vocals – it seems to enhance even when just tickling the signal lightly. It's

also one of those pieces of equipment where you don't have to hunt around for the optimal setting – it usually sounds very good with a variety of settings, and frequently fairly inaudible in operation.

Programme material can begin to get slightly woolly – with heavy compression the low end tends to be emphasised; but the GX exhibits far less of the pumping side-effect than others. 'Warmth' is an overused term, but any signal passing through this unit cannot fail to benefit from a degree of warming. Although there is no lack of top end, the X has a very friendly sound.

When the Attack and Release are set at their fastest, things can get quite crunchy at high ratios, but I absolutely love this. The Attack ranges from so fast that it kills transients, through to giving drums a real emphasis at 12 o'clock, and on to seemingly taking a number of days to react. The Release is similarly wide-ranging, although for extreme drum effects I occasionally wished for an even faster response. The relay bypass is welcome, although with power off no signal passes whatsoever.

The manual warns that the meter is damped and serves as only a rough indication of compression, but it seems perfectly useful in operation. It moves quite a lot even when the compression is fairly subtle, roughly 6dB gain reduction when half way down, so it looks great as it whizzes around.

Sadly it seems that the source of these meters has dried-up. With much regret, the designer informs me that there will be a new version of this model with a somewhat different front panel, although the sonics (hopefully) will remain the same. This is a great shame, but the good news is that the replacement will

probably fit in a 2U box and will be sold at a cheaper price, about UK£1,435 (DKK15,500). An absolute bargain. The 3U version is the most expensive model in the Gyratec range, but understandably so.

It is carefully and expertly engineered, well-built, with lovely big knobs and useful rack handles. It will undoubtedly become a studio conversation piece, and is great value. But hurry if you want the speedometer version! ■

PROS

One of the best compressors available at any price, but not the most expensive by some margin; successor will be cheaper; sounds as good as it looks (and vice versa).

CONS

Meters no longer available; no bypass on power off; stereo only, no dual mono.

EXTRAS

As George mentions, the speedo-equipped GX will soon be replaced by a more 'normal' version that will also be cheaper than the circa UK£2100 (DKK22500) that the original box demands.



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