The winners…
Avid Pro Tools 11
API The Box
Drawmer 1973
Maag Audio EQ2
Universal Audio
Apollo 16
Schoeps V4 U
PMC twotwo.8
Izotope RX 3 Advanced
Audient ASP880
Thermionic Culture
Culture Vulture Super 15
Nagra Seven
Ed Harcourt
Robert Edwards
Chris Watson
Michael Narduzzo
ICP Studios, Belgium
The twotwo series active monitors make choosing and using a reference stereo or surround monitor easy. All three models are equipped with multiple analogue and digital inputs, and powerful DSP that optimises the response of the drivers, guaranteeing a flawless crossover. Unique audiophile amplifiers produce high-resolution audio with unparalleled headroom and detail. The range produces an expansive sound, its compact dimensions belaying its impressive low-frequency performance, wide dispersion and accurate imaging.

Whether you’re driving the twotwo digitally from a console in a world-class studio, or plugging them into a laptop via a phono lead in a hotel room, you can work faster with the sonic transparency and accuracy that has made PMC speakers the reference monitors of choice amongst the world’s audio elite.

- Reference monitors with ATL™ bass loading technology
- Audiophile grade dual Class-D amplification
- Powerful DSP engine optimises driver response, crossover & EQ
- Class leading connectivity – analogue & digital up to 192kHz
- Perfect in both vertical & horizontal orientation
- Precision drivers designed and built by PMC

Complete monitoring control with the DMC

PMC’s DMC is a sonically transparent digital monitor controller compatible with the twotwo series and all PMC monitors with digital inputs.

The DMC accepts two 5.1 and three stereo inputs, and can drive independent 5.1 and stereo loudspeaker monitoring systems. The hardware controls also provide extensive bass-management facilities, along with a range of customisable parameters to optimise the monitor performance.
In making a decision to design a studio vocal microphone Schoeps determined for themselves exactly what the characteristics of such a microphone should be, and which (if any) traits of a large diaphragm capacitor (LDC) were desirable. Their listening tests concluded that ‘naturalness’ was the most important factor and that this was best served by having as even an off-axis response as possible. Another, related consideration was the diffuse field response of the microphone and again the consensus was that this should track the on-axis response smoothly without drawing attention to itself. One trait of LDC designs though is that the on-axis polar response starts to narrow earlier than small diaphragm designs and this narrowing has an effect on the diffuse field response causing it to roll off earlier. The smoothness of response seems to call for a SDC but the narrowing effect suggests an LDC — Schoeps responded in the V4 U with a unique capsule design that mates a tapered collar to a small diaphragm capsule, giving it an effective diameter for certain acoustic conditions of 33mm — certainly large diaphragm territory — while preserving the desirable characteristics of a small diaphragm design. The capsule and collar have been engineered to work as one resulting in a capsule that is essentially new.

The looks of the V4 U pay unashamed homage to an earlier Schoeps design from the 1950s — the CMS1/3 — and a handsome looking microphone it is too, with the teardrop shaped capsule assembly capable of swivelling forwards and backwards just like its vintage ancestor. ‘It has a character all of its own and even after a relatively short acquaintance I’d add it to our mic cupboard in a heartbeat. It’s a great example of clever thinking, innovation and even its price is reasonable in the scale of things. I’d suggest that you don’t think of it as just a ‘studio vocal mic’ — it’s so much more than that.’ Resolution V12.7

Contact
SCHOEPS, GERMANY:
Website: www.schoeps.de
ALSO NOMINATED: AEA N22; DPA d:facto II; Audio-Technica AT4060a; Neumann TLM107

Izotope RX 3 Advanced

RX 3 is a comprehensive audio restoration toolkit, providing tools to address virtually any audio problem. The interface is built around a spectrogram view, which superimposes an audio waveform on top of a multiresolution spectral display. There are options to control the density of the amplitude display as well as favouring particular frequency ranges making it easier to deal with certain problems, such as hum and buzzes.

Many of the newer features are only available in the Advanced version, such as Deregiver, Dialogue Denoiser, Multi-Resolution Spectral Repair, Advanced Declick and an Advanced Denoiser. These dramatically increase the value of the Advanced version, and along with the Deconstruct module make it a must have upgrade for serious users. Izotope’s Insight metering plug-in is also included and RX 3 ships as an AAX 64-bit plug-in.

The Denoiser module now offers the ability to selectively define multiple frequency ranges for the noise profile when using the standalone app, rather than having to use the entire spectrum. The result is a cleaner and more natural sound with fewer artefacts. Deregiver is designed to reduce the amount of reverberation in a signal and has four frequency bands to manipulate the intensity of the effect. The Declick module now lets users define the click type (click or thump), to skew the processing towards higher or lower frequencies, and to adjust the width of the repair area. The Declip module is significantly improved over RX 2, and offers immediate visual feedback of the threshold as well as a ‘suggest’ button when in doubt.

‘The real star of the show is the Spectral Repair module. With this you have the ability to select individual events using a variety of tools you would expect to find in a photo editing app. In addition to time and/or frequency selection tools, a lasso, brush and magic wand tool make targeting specific audio problems a breeze. One extremely cool feature is being able to click on a selection with the magic wand tool and it will automatically select all harmonics — great for removing troubling hums or buzzes.’ Resolution V13.2

Contact
IZOTOPE, US:
Website: www.izotope.com
ALSO NOMINATED: Audiotech Digital Pento 4; Universal Audio UAD Ocean Way Studios; McDSP 6020; FabFilter Pro-MB; Waves/Abbey Road Reel ADT
Expanding on its renowned range of dynamics processors, this affordable 3-band stereo FET compressor will be appreciated by many engineers. Said to be the culmination of 30 years of development and experience, the 1973 combines the functionality and control of the Drawmer S3 with the familiarity and quality of the 1960 and 1968, providing three bands of transparent soft knee compression for the price of a conventional full-band compressor.

The 1973 has a set of crossover filters that split the audio into three frequency bands, each band then passes through its own compressor and is independently adjusted, after which the signals are recombined before the final Wet/Dry mix and output levels can be adjusted. The advantage of this approach is that one band’s compression has no effect on the others for versatile and precise dynamic control.

Each band has controls for Threshold, Gain, switched Attack and Release with gain reduction metering. It’s a fast reacting soft knee FET design with excellent Left/Right tracking across the full range of compression. Variable Wet/Dry Mix plus Output Gain knobs give complete control over parallel compression and output levels. The variable band split filters operate at 6dB/octave with switchable Mute and Bypass on each band making tuning-in simple. Big and Air modes help to preserve deep lows and enhance highs and the two VU meters have switchable +10dB meter rescale modes and a switchable peak mode.

‘I thoroughly enjoyed designing the 1973, it was great challenge to bring together the best aspects from several of our existing products to produce the most affordable analogue three-band stereo compressor on the market today,’ said Ivor Drawmer.

Contact
DRAWMER, UK:
Website: www.drawmer.com

ALSO NOMINATED:
Crane Song Falcon;
Dangerous Music Compressor; Radial PreComp

Contact
API, US:
Website: www.apiaudio.com

ALSO NOMINATED:
Avid S6; Slate Raven MTX;
SSL Sigma; Studer Vista X
The Apollo 16 provides 16 x 16 analogue inputs and outputs on four DB25 connectors plus a pair of XLR outputs for the additional stereo Monitor path. Audio quality is slightly improved over the already excellent original Apollo and the aluminium-coloured front panel is even sleeker. The 16 lacks the four microphone preamps and headphone outputs of the original Apollo so the simpler front panel provides status lights, 16 LED bar meters with a button to flip to Input or Output, and a Power indicator. There’s a knurled Monitor volume/encoder knob surrounded by a green level setting LED ring, stereo monitor output meters, and a Power toggle.

A connection is provided for connecting two Apollo 16s together to operate as a single system for 32 x 32 analogue I-O. There’s a unified Monitor section and in place of the headphone outputs four Cue mixes, plus two Aux buses all set up from the Console application. There are AES-EBU XLRs with settings in the software for sample rate conversion, and an option to mirror Monitor outputs. An optional Thunderbolt card is also available.

Using the Console, latency is all but eliminated, even when running multiple UAD plug-ins, either for monitoring purposes, or when recording through them. The Console uses its own delay compensation system, and everything works extremely elegantly. Monitoring using the Console is straightforward, with easy-to-use drop-down menus to send Cues to particular outputs.

‘Overall the Apollo 16 is a terrific unit, clearly more suited to existing studio setups (with mic preamps and headphone amps) than the original Apollo. The quality of the audio — I-O and plug-ins — is top-notch, and the low-latency aspect of the Apollo makes this a fantastic centrepiece to any studio setup.’ Resolution V15.3

Contact
UNIVERSAL AUDIO, US:
Website: www.uaudio.com

ALSO NOMINATED: DAD AX32 V1.3;
Digigrind MGB/MGO; Prism Sound Atlas
Pro Tools 11

Pro Tools 11 crystallises AAX in a 64-bit reality and represents a major rewrite of the engine code, the most obvious result of which is that you can now access larger amounts of RAM for virtual instruments, samplers and plug-ins.

A major advantage of ditching the old TDM system is that off-line bounce is now finally available. A separate Low Latency input buffer ensures usable monitoring setups while still making use of instruments and plug-ins that require higher buffer settings. This automatically provides a low latency situation for monitoring through Pro Tools. There is now Dynamic Plug-in Processing, which releases host DSP when no clip is present in the timeline, allowing for much improved horsepower from the system, assuming not everything is playing all the time.

Video support is much improved with the Avid Video Engine built-in, allowing users to play and edit a wide range of HD formats directly in the timeline with no need to transcode. This uses the same core engine as Media Composer and you can hook up Avid Nitris, DX, Mojo DX and other third-party video interfaces for monitoring of DNxHD and QuickTime media.

You can now write automation while recording — a useful workflow option when printing tracks back for multiple audio formats. Particularly welcome is the brand new metering engine. The Workspace is much improved; customisable views allow catalogues, volumes and assets all to appear in one window where you can browse, audition, relink and so on. Search is vastly improved, with multiple conditional search functions.

‘Overall it’s a big thumbs-up for the refreshed and revitalised Pro Tools. I am delighted with the workflow improvements; it’s stable, fast, and may even give your old computer a new lease of life with the improved processing efficiency and increased memory access.’

Resolution V12.6

Contact
AVID, US:
Website: www.avid.com

ALSO NOMINATED: Cockos Reaper V4; Sadie 6; Steinberg Wavelab 8

PMC twotwo.8

The twotwo.8 is the largest in PMC’s 2-way nearfield active monitors range but is manufactured in proportion with the smaller models, the twotwo.5 and twotwo.6. In this way, the front baffle is kept as narrow as possible, minimising the effect of baffle colouration and ensuring imaging is kept sharp.

With its eight-inch bass driver, the twotwo.8 is capable of a higher maximum SPL (up to 115dB) and greater bass extension than its smaller siblings (down to 35Hz), but is otherwise consistent with the twotwo.5 and twotwo.6 in terms of sound and feature-set, providing the same transparency and reference-quality monitoring.

As with the smaller twotwo models, the twotwo.8 combines Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) bass loading technology with sophisticated digital signal processing, making a low-distortion, reference monitor suited to stereo or surround monitoring.

Featuring analogue phono and XLR inputs plus an AES3 digital accepting audio at up to 192kHz, the twotwo.8 is quick and easy to get up and running, whether in a studio with a mixing console or with a laptop on the move. And, of course, the twotwo.8 may be mounted vertically or horizontally without compromising tonal accuracy or stereo/surround imaging.

Contact
PMC, UK:
Website: www.pmc-speakers.com

ALSO NOMINATED: Genelec 8010; RCF Ayra Four; Presonus Sceptre S8 CoActual; Yamaha HS8
C elebrating 15 years of The Culture Vulture distortion unit, feature improvements to the Super 15 include a new two-position Presence switch and Drive now with three positions, adding a +10dB option between Normal and Overdrive for even more crunch and brightness options.

The special edition front panel departs from the usual Thermionic black and white with a dark red finish. This is a dual-channel device, with knobs and switches laid out for each channel in mirrored fashion. Drive and Output levels no longer just go up to 11 but now reach 15! There is actually a bit more gain than on previous versions with the maximum output easily able to drive at +18dBm.

The Drive knobs are related to the three-position Drive toggles and these not only set coarse gain on the input but also add some high frequency bite in the +10dB boosted position. In Overdrive the gain is a massive 28dB above normal. Bias knobs vary the current through the second valve by changing the positive voltage on its cathode. At lower Bias settings the valve is over-fed and things sound warmer and fatter. At higher settings it is starved and becomes thinner, almost sounding gated at the highest settings.

The first position of the Function knob is T for Triode, and this can be set to a virtually clean signal path. Triodes add (relatively) smoother, gentler even harmonics, whereas the P1 position is configured as Pentode, generating odd harmonics that can sound more akin to tape overload.

“The Culture Vulture Super 15 is incredibly versatile. It makes a great “ultimate fuzz pedal” for guitars en route to an amp. It makes a fantastic mix enhancer when set fairly clean, and nicely warms instruments during overdubbing. Considering the amount of gain available, the noise floor is remarkably low. The Culture Vulture opens up a huge palette of possibilities, so if you like a big sound and a bit (or a lot) of rich crunchiness, this is the only game in town.” Resolution V12.6

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Thermionic Culture
The Culture Vulture Super 15

Nagra Seven
Portable 2 channel
digital recorder

UK enquiries to: nagraaudio@sennheiser.co.uk

Distributed in the UK by:

Contact
THERMIONIC CULTURE, UK:
Website: www.thermionicculture.co.uk

ALSO NOMINATED: Gyraf Audio GXXI
The ASP880 is an 8-channel microphone preamplifier and A-DC and is the first product released by the company under its new ownership. It has eight of Audient’s renowned console mic preamps, two JFET DI inputs, top-end Burr-Brown convertor technology, variable impedance and variable high pass filters all packed into a rackmount 1U.

Described as a perfect front-end to a DAW system the manufacturer has ensured the ASP880 competes with the best mic pres and convertors and gives users the option to upgrade their existing setup by bypassing their interface’s analogue stage and A-D. Each channel has a balanced insert with direct access to the convertor so the ASP880 can be used as an 8-channel mic pre and a standalone convertor and therefore interfaces intelligently and flexibly with modern outboard set ups.

Channels have three-position impedance switches with impedances up to 2800ohms, a high pass filter sweeping from 25Hz to 250Hz running at 12dB/octave while an A-D button activates the aforementioned split in the processing between preamps and convertors.

Warming up and solidifying the low end with a gentle 88Hz bump on the LMF band completed the picture satisfyingly. The narrower low frequency settings are fairly forgiving and not as narrow as can often be achieved with parametrics. A gentle boost to the very lowest frequency settings can warm and solidify the kick drum or whole mix, and the effect is audible even on NS-10s.”

Resolution V12.8

Maag Audio EQ2

While the 2012 Resolution Award winning EQ4 is 6-band, the EQ2 is 2-band although the high frequency band, known as the AIR Band, shares some similarity with the earlier device. The EQ2 is beautifully built, with a glossy blue front panel with white and red legending. The five knobs are detented and have clear pointers and are usefully colour coded.

The upper AIR Band is a switched frequency selector knob, a Gain knob, and an In/Out mini-toggle and is a shelving-type boost-only band. Frequency settings are 2.5, 5, 10, 15, 20 and 40kHz. Gain is detented with 21 positions from 0 to 10, although actual maximum gain varies from 12 to 17dB with the selected frequency. The LMF band is a boost-only bell curve and has a similar arrangement of controls. However, here there are two sets of frequency labels that depend on the position of a further toggle that selects between the tighter (red) and broader (white) frequencies. White settings are ‘Sub’, 57, 88, 220, 400Hz and 1.4kHz. Red settings are at 40, 65, 150, 250Hz and 1kHz. Finally near the bottom is an Input Attenuation knob.

The EQ2 sounds absolutely gorgeous across the mix, whether adding sparkle or weight — or both. Boosting a few dB at 40kHz sounds completely natural, just opening things and revealing detail and beauty. But at the other end of the AIR band, boosting everything from 2.5kHz upwards can also lighten and brighten gorgeously, just adding life to everything.

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Resolution V12.8

Audient ASP880

Contact
MAAG AUDIO, US:
Website: www.maagaudio.com

ALSO NOMINATED: 
Phoenix Audio DRS-EQ/500;
API 565; Under Tone Audio MPEQ-1

Contact
AUDIENT, UK:
Website: www.audient.com

ALSO NOMINATED: 
Gem Audio Labs Sculptor;
Phoenix Audio DRS1R/500; Radial MS4 Gold Digger;
Vertigo Sound VSP-2; Warm Audio WA12
The centre of Brussels is home to a remarkable performer friendly studio. It’s a three-room complex, with self-contained SSL 4k G, Neve 88R and EMI-Neve equipped rooms all with associated superb large recording areas, plus a Telefunken/Siemens desk placed in a fourth ‘space’ and the biggest store of instruments, backline, mics and outboard you’ll see in a studio anywhere; it’s better than many rental firms.

It’s residential with loads of shared space — dining areas, a pool, a gym — all in a gated plot within minutes of the Belgian capital’s airport and the Eurostar/train terminals.

It has an intriguing backstory of organic growth managed by people who have stayed true to their initial belief that a studio has to be primarily a creative place. ‘The way I saw a studio was that I’d be bored stiff if I just had a room with a couple of NS10s and I was renting it,’ says owner John Hastry. ‘And a lot of studios were like that. With all the equipment and gear we have here everyone who comes in makes a new combination of stuff. You start with a young unknown band, they won’t have much equipment but they have lots of ideas. Here we level the playing field for them and say “OK, you got the ideas, we’ve got all this, you make an amazing album” because it’s fun. It’s part of the creative process, which to me is what a studio should be — not just a room with a console and some speakers. That’s boring and it should have evolved from there. Every day is new for us.’

Nagra Seven

The Nagra Seven 2-track preserves a miniature version of the function control and the knobs of earlier Nagras combined in a small package that weighs around 1.2kg with batteries.

Externally, the port side is inputs, to starboard are the outputs while internally there is a user-expandable 16Gb micro-SD card. The front panel is stunningly clean — just two faders, the function knob, a ¼-inch headphone socket and level control, slate mic and Record LED, and a 4-inch colour touchscreen, which is key to the simplicity. The build of the machine is beautiful.

Recording format is strictly PCM linear. Normal recording doesn’t come simpler — turn the main switch to Test, set the levels of the analogue inputs (digital ones are fixed 24-bit) and move the control to Rec. The red light comes on and the device records. Turn the switch to Stop and then Play, and it plays the last recording back. The Stop position leaves everything powered but allows you to set parameters and configure functions, and almost everything on the Seven can be changed in software.

Most of the rest of the control interface is via the touchscreen, which responds to taps on icons, taps in bands across the screen to swap pictorial submenus on the main screen, and in some cases swipes.

‘Almost every aspect of the recorder is configurable. Which icons are available on the main screens as shortcuts, the colours of the various sections of the meter, toggling (or not) of slate and tone buttons, and a host of other settings can be personalised.

‘There are a plethora of alternative 2-track digital recorders available but most look like cheap alarm clocks compared to the Seven and I know of none with such flexibility. For high quality radio journalism and ultra-accurate music recording — and where budget is not an issue — this machine would be very desirable.’ (Resolution V13.4)

Contact
NAGRA, SWITZERLAND:
Website: www.nagraaudio.com

ALSO NOMINATED: Tascam DA-3000

ICP Studios

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ALSO NOMINATED: Alvernia, Poland; The Garage, Italy
State Of The Ark, UK; Tileyard Studios, UK
Ed’s songwriting and performing skills have led him to a series of solo albums employing producers like Tim Holmes, Gil Norton and Tchad Blake or self-producing. He has also collaborated and co-written with Ron Sexsmith, Lissie, Kristina Train, Paloma Faith, Jimmy Hogarth, Lisa Marie Presley, Ren Harvieu, Jamie N Commons, Rae And Christian, and Ed has increasingly been asked to produce — he co-wrote and produced the Sophie Ellis-Bextor album Wanderlust. As well as his own album, he’s been working with Ren Harvieu on her second album, rapper Fem Fel, co-writing with Dimitri Tikovoi and Rob Ellis for Marianne Faithfull using her lyrics, and doing remixes.

Michael started as a dubbing theatre assistant at Universal Sound in 1976, learning from Lou Hanks who was the main mixer and co-owner. After a couple of years assisting he began to record voice-overs and commentaries moving on to simple mixes for corporates. He says his first break came around 1981 when he mixed a BBC World About Us which was his first TV credit — the team was happy with the results and asked him to mix the next programme. By 1985 he was getting at least eight TV credits a week.

He has four BAFTA nominations and a BAFTA Award for a BBC drama series Underbelly. He's been mixing Holby City since 2001, which involves every aspect of sound postproduction from the import, tracklaying, Foley (artist and recordist), ADR, premixing, final mixing and lay-back; also the occasional boom swinging on set.

He works on Pro Tools 10 with a D-Control desk, which he describes as the most flexible and fast system he’s ever used.

Combining a musical background with a passion for location recording and a fascination with the natural world, Chris is not an average recordist. He was a founder member of the band Cabaret Voltaire in Sheffield in the 1970s but left and worked at Tyne Tees during the 1980s as a location sound man. He worked on The Tube, among many other programmes, but gradually specialised in wildlife location recording doing his first work with David Attenborough in 1996. He has worked on every BBC Attenborough series since then, as well as many other programmes for BBC Radio and TV, feature films, and specialist audio installations in surround.

This year Robert celebrated 40 years in broadcast audio. So far this year, he recorded and mixed the Big Reunion Concert at the Hammersmith Apollo for ITV 2, mixed 20 live Premier League football matches for Sky in 5.1, mixed two complete series of Celebrity Juice with Keith Lemon, mixed all the live finals week for Britain’s Got Talent, travelled to Brazil to be part of the World Quality Control Team for the World Cup and mixed a series of the renewed Through the Keyhole for ITV. At the moment he’s embarking on the 11th Series of ITV’s X Factor, mixing all the live episodes for ITV1, plus another series of Celebrity Juice.