

sound **technology**

Getting the Goods

APB-DynaSonics ProRack House Rackmountable Mixer

by Randy Poole

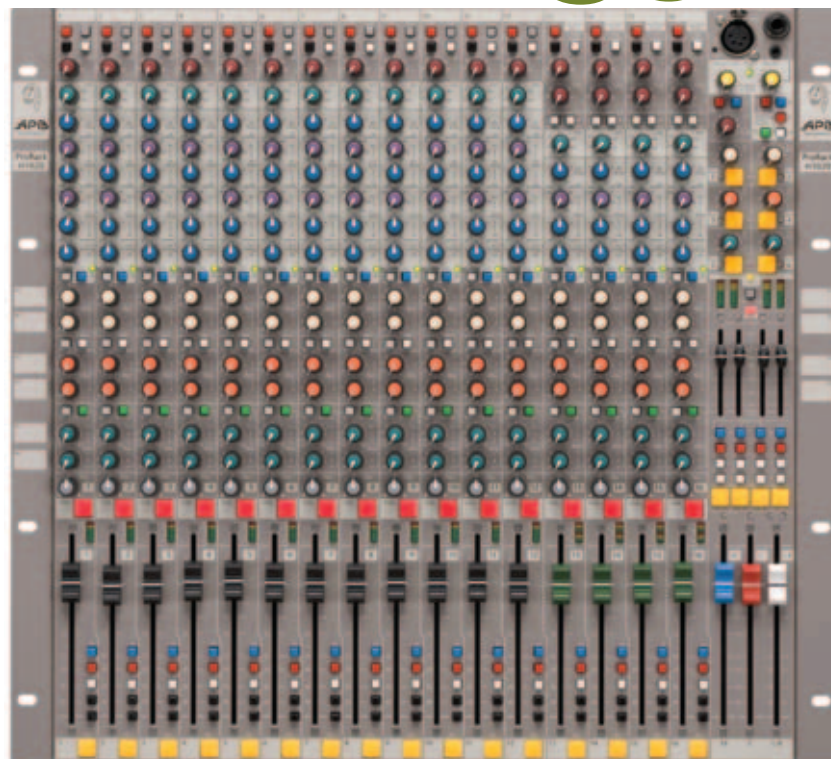
Since many may have not heard of APB-DynaSonics, here's a little background on the company that might be helpful. The company was founded by a trio of engineer/managers—Chuck Augustowski, John Petrucelli and Taz Bhogal. Together they have 65 years of experience in console design, spending much of their careers with leading audio manufacturers. Together with investors in 2004, they formed their own company: APB-DynaSonics.

One of the unique design concepts of the APB product line is that the bulk of its electronics are passed down from the high-end Spectra series to the more cost-effective models like the ProRack House—mainly sacrificing just a few features on the way to the less-expensive line, instead of sacrificing audio quality. Currently, the company continues to grow its product line of analog consoles, based on the design philosophy of solid construction,

high-grade components and a modular assembly that provides easy servicing, increased reliability and custom-ordered options from the factory.

The ProRack House H1020 is comprised of 12 mono channels and four stereo channels. It includes low-phase shift circuitry, 4-band EQ with sweepable mids on the mono channels, 3-band with sweepable mids for stereo channels; all inputs feature a variable hi-pass filter. Outputs from each channel include six aux sends, four Group outs, as well as a Left/Right master stereo out, and two separate mono outs labeled Mono and Center. Altogether that makes for 14 outputs and 20 inputs in 10 rack spaces.

After using the console over an extended period, it really became clear how great the layout and color coding for this console is. Each section, whether EQ, sends or mic pres, is clearly differentiated by various knob colors. There is even a different background color for the EQ section as well as appropri-



ate colors for all switches. This made getting around on this console quite effortless, in spite of its compact nature.

Illuminated controls further the practicality of the layout. All the solos and mute switches are large and backlit once depressed. The EQ "in" switch is smaller and

also lit with a green side light. I find these features uncommon, especially in the console's price range, and much needed for a console of this size.

Also in the lighting department, the ProRack provides LED meters on all channels, groups and bus outputs. This includes 6-segment meters on channel inputs, bi-colored LEDs on all mix sends

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Coming Into Focus

Focusrite ISA-One Portable Preamp

by Christopher Walsh

It's a great time to be a location recordist. The combination of laptop computer and Mbox—and any of a number of DAW interface products—has allowed multitrack recording with a minimal array of gear to transport and set up.

Focusrite has upped the ante on adding a high-qual-

ity front end to such an array with the ISA-One, a versatile and rugged preamplifier built to address location projects. Complete with flight case, the ISA-One brings the original ISA-110 module topology to any environment.

The ISA-One's front panel will be familiar to users of the ISA 220 Session Pack or ISA 430 Producer Pack, for example. The



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layout allows easy selection and adjustment of mic, line and instrument inputs (input selector switch is on the lower left corner of the front panel).

The gain dial allows 10 dB steps from 0 to +30; with the "30-60" switch selected, the same dial operates, not surprisingly, from 30 to 60 dB. The adjacent trim dial allows an additional 20 dB of gain in mic or line mode, useful for ribbon and other low-output microphones. Below these dials are selector switches for phantom power, phase invert, high-pass filter and an insert, as well as the aforementioned 30-60 switch. The Mic input impedance switch allows matching of the ISA-One to a particular microphone, a very handy feature.

Beneath the VU meter, the instrument section features its own stepped, +10 to +40dB gain knob, active when the input selector is switched to instrument. The DI and Amp inputs at the instrument section allow an instrument to be connected and sent back to an amplifier. The ISA-One

also features a headphone jack with independent gain dial and cue mix button. The cue mix button sends the signal connected to the Cue Mix Inputs (on the rear panel) to the headphones, allowing a monitor mix to be fed to the instrumentalist. Lastly, the front panel features sample rate and word clock selector section.

The rear panel houses mic and line-level inputs (both XLR and TRS for the latter),

Product information

UA PCI ExpressCard DSP Expanders
UAD-Xpander Xpress: \$999
UAD-Xpander Xpert: \$1,299
UAD-Xpander Xtreme: \$2,599
UAD-Xtenda: \$129.99
Universal Audio
www.uaudio.com

XLR output for mic/line/instrument input signal and a separate XLR output for a signal connected to the DI input; peak and VU meter calibration buttons; insert send and

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APB- DynaSonics

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and busses, as well as 8-segment metering on the four main or group outs. Additionally, a 4-pin XLR socket is provided for an optional gooseneck lamp.

Another unique feature of the ProRack House is the back panel. With the removal of a few screws it swings out to 90 degrees (great for desktop applications), 135 degrees, or can be kept closed for rack-mounting. Throw in all these features and a few more, including 100mm faders, and what do you have? That depends—what does it sound like?

I'm glad you asked. The sound is, well, the best part. Just so you know, I used it in the studio on several occasions, cutting drums, guitars and later vocals. On a few of these tracking dates I was able to mult the drum mics coming into my normal pre/EQs (let's just say they were in the Neve family), and to the ProRack House. The ProRack channels were recorded to additional tracks at 24-bit and compared during the tracking session, and later on in the mix session. I also sent samples of the kick drum from both signal chains to a couple of engineers for their comments.

I was really impressed at the punch, the low end and the overall sound of these

pres. I kept switching the entire drum kit back and forth on playback during the tracking session while everyone in the room said, "Wow, that's that little mixer!" The e-mail response was overwhelmingly positive as well. There were, of course, slight differences between these pre/EQs and the reference path, like a touch more air and sub lows on the high-dollar pres, but the overall differences between them were really minor. I found the EQ quite easy to work, and it is my new favorite on any small console. Even though the top and bottom freqs are fixed on this console, there is just something about four bands of EQ that works with my brain. You could really turn the knobs and focus in on the frequencies, without too much phase shift or noise. I also didn't run out of headroom while boosting the EQ bands, like on some other consoles of this dimension.

All in all, the console provided an enjoyable combination of features and sound quality. This review would not be complete without pointing out any shortcomings, but those are minor. The direct outs on the console come standard as pre of any EQ and fader, good for live applications. There is, however, a factory option for them to put the direct outs where you want them, so you may want to specify that from the factory, depending on the planned application. Also, there is scribble script space on the sides of the console for the sends and busses but not for the channels. So leave a space beneath the console in the rack so you can have a place to write your input-channel list.

The ProRack House H1020 makes great use of available space, and has the most intuitive layout and design in its class. The sonics are impressive and just what small console users have been waiting for (and you can link two consoles together for twice the fun). The only way APB is getting this one back is when the company replaces it with my custom-ordered version.

Product information

ProRack House H1020 small-format mixer: \$3,400
APB-DynaSonics
www.apb-dynasonics.com

Focusrite

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return; external mono signal input; stereo cue mix inputs; power supply and power switch. The back panel also houses and optional ADC card (which was not included on the unit supplied). The ADC allows AES, S/PDIF and ADAT formats at up to 24-bit/192 kHz operation.

I used the ISA-One with an electric bass at Cowboy Technical Services (Pro ToolsHD) and with a room mic and vocal mic at my personal studio (Pro Tools LE). To my ear, the bass coming out of the DI sounded beautiful: full, rounded and somewhat deeper in tone than a miked bass cabinet. But the ISA-One is a fine, quiet and very clean pre, regardless of the chosen input—identical, to my ears, to the aforementioned Session and Producer packs.

With an LE system, the ISA-One matches up well with the Great River ME-1NV preamp and SSL Alpha Channel onsite, providing a nice palette for a fairly mini-

mal, Digi 002-based setup. I have not yet tried a location recording with the ISA-One and an Mbox, but previous experience demonstrates not only its sonic utility but also the advantage of monitoring through the former's headphone output to resolve latency issues. Feeding a mono signal through the Ext I/P input on the rear panel and blending with the mic, line or instrument input, one can record vocals or instrument overdubs, at home or anywhere else, with no compromise or workarounds.

The ISA-One is impressively packed with features, and its rugged shell and included flight case make it a perfect accessory for location recording and remote rigs. In the studio, it delivers another high-quality preamp at an attractive price.

Product information

Focusrite ISA-One Classic Single-Channel Microphone Preamplifier: \$999.99
Focusrite
www.focusrite.com

Soundcraft

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go into a screen to see something," explains Shears. Indeed, though the Si3 will be able to support an external screen and editor software, the onboard touchscreen is diminutive and is primarily used for housekeeping and setup functions, and for display of EQ curves.

The Si3's four modular rear-panel I/O modules each has 16 inputs and eight outputs, with a central I/O panel handling such signals as the main output busses, assignable analog insert I/O and external stereo playback device input. In

addition, Lexicon signal processing units are built into the Si3-four of the same units employed on Soundcraft's Vi6. The few options available for the already full-featured desk will include power supply redundancy, a UPS backup and, for four option slots, cards to handle additional interfaces like MADI, CobraNet and I/O suitable for direct connect to digital stage boxes and headphone systems. Harman HiQnet connection is, as one would expect, standard.

Two 16-channel fader sections sit either side of center, each controlling 32 channels of input. In a "Global" mode (think "horizontal"), the encoder and corresponding OLEDs for each strip control the identical functions for each channel allowing a quick view of pans, bus sends, mic gains and so forth across each input channel. In the "Channel" view (or vertical), the full range of controls (gain, pan, EQ, dynamics, etc.) for a selected channel are laid out across the 16 encoders and displays. "Channel mode is like you've taken your analog channel strip and you're just lying it on its side," explains Shears.

In the center section, 12 faders and two rows of 12 encoders and displays allow similar control of output and VCA group functions, and the parameters of the Lexicon processors. Soundcraft's FaderGlow illuminated fader tracks change illumination color by function for a quick indication of whether the faders are controlling groups, VCA's, mute group assignments or channel levels.

Snapshot automation and preset and user-definable keys round out the Si3's capabilities. A walk through of the Si3 draws the simple conclusion, "It's a console," bridging the simplicity and familiarity of an analog console with the power and flexibility of digital.

Soundcraft
www.soundcraftdigital.com

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