



Italian warmth

Wes Maebe takes MC Audio Labs' EQ1ch three-band valve equaliser out the box to mix Freestate and New Model Army and found warmth and elegance in a 2U rack...

I met the guys from MC Audio Lab at this year's AES Convention in London. A little stand, just around the corner from my APRS base camp, was displaying very cool looking black rack units with valves, blue lights, rather chunky controls and funky VU meters. It goes without saying that I had to go and investigate. MC's Manuel Curcuruto can spot a gear freak when they see one and got me wearing headphones and playing with the EQ1ch single channel valve eq. Exhibition hum and headphones – a distinctly imperfect listening environment – but I could immediately hear this box had serious potential.

WHAT'S IN THAT BOX?

The EQ1ch is a single channel, three-band valve equaliser. It is entirely passive with the valve stages taking care of the buffering and the output stage amplification.

The low frequency band and the high frequency cut both have a shelving characteristic, going from 20 to 150Hz and four to 20kHz, respectively. It is the LF band that gives this unit its Pultec feel. You have boost and cut on the same band, which can be used at the same time, again very much like the Pultec PEQ.

When you use the boost on its own, it will give you 14dB of gain. The cut can shelve down to about 12dB. When used together, the cut amount drops once you boost past the first quarter.

It is very important to realise that the cut of the LF band works at a x10 ratio. So, if you boost at 20Hz, the cut will start rolling off at 200Hz.

The high cut can attenuate down to 10dB. The mid/high mid band is nice and wide, ranging from 600Hz to 16kHz with a very musical Q control and a seriously good amount of possible boost.

The large output knob acts as a master volume control, feeding the Lundahl output transformer and a simple three LED meter, which tell you that you have signal, are at optimal output or going over the limit.

Weighing in at 5kg, the EQ1ch is a hefty beast, both physically and sonically. The front panel has the legend engraved in a clear silver. You'll know this unit is powered on once you flick the bulky power switch and the bright blue light comes on behind the EQ1ch name tag.

The back panel provides us with XLR in and out. You have a ground lift disconnecting pin 1 from the signal ground in order to avoid hum. The earth lift elevates the chassis mains earth from pin 1 to avoid hum loops. From the moment you lay eyes on the MC Audio Lab products, you can see that there's a

passionate outfit behind this and that a lot of care and attention has gone in to designing and building these units.

SWEET MUSIC TO MY EARS... AND MY CLIENTS'

I was working on a few different projects at the time I received the EQ1ch from MC Audio Lab's UK distributor, Sound Network. It came at just the right time and I was able to put it through some serious, real life situation tests.

The very first component I threw at the EQ1ch was a vocal. I was in the middle of mixing a track for Freestate and really wanted to get this track out of the box. I sent the vocal through some gentle vintage compression and into the EQ1ch. That's when I first realised you can hit this baby hard. This is not a surgical eq, rather an extremely musical ally.

I was missing a bit of air and presence on this particular vocal, so I mainly used the mid section at around 8kHz. On the widest Q and the boost almost on full I was expecting a very screechy result. What came back at me was a present, breathing and silky smooth vocal. Those following the Sonic Cuisine online will know that's when I fell in love with this eq unit.

In a world where space is at a premium and money must be wisely spent, I am always looking for units that are not one trick ponies and I was far from done test driving the unit.

The kicks and bass from a pretty heavy Abstract Source house track were next in line. When I fed both EQ1ch'd components back in the mix the producer was knocked off his feet. The kick hit you right in the face and stomach and the bass had a nice and round, yet old-school, growly character.

Convinced and converted I was not going to let this unit go without using it to its full potential. The guys from New Model Army are celebrating 30 years in the business and will be releasing a double album anthology. They asked me to re-mix one of the songs and you can hear the EQ1ch working away on the track *Someone Like Jesus*.

GET CONNECTED

If you're looking for a top notch valve eq to put in your recording chain or to warm up those zeros and ones, give this beast a whirl. Check out mcaudiolab.com online and join them on Facebook. And if you want to get your hands on one, drop the guys at Sound Network a line or swing by the Sonic Cuisine to see it in action. Keep it sounding warm and sparkly.

> soundnetwork.co.uk
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