

Universal Audio 6176

Keeping the faith with its original designs, UA is now combining popular processing sections from the 'old' boxes into new and different units. **GEORGE SHILLING** continues to be very impressed.

SO FAR, ALL THE Universal Audio Classics seem to have been fairly, erm, universally praised. It seems the Putnam legacy is a licence to print money, although the company has been very careful about preserving the sound and feel of the ancient originals, even when inventing new products that are not strictly reissues.

This unit is one such creation, cobbling together a channel from the excellent 2-610 (rather than the M610 with its sparser EQ section) paired with an 1176 and squeezed into a 2U case. The single 610B channel fits naturally into half the space of the case, but the original (and reissued) 1176 takes a whole 2U case to itself normally, so some clever adjustments have been made to integrate the innards here.

The pictures look very impressive, and the 6176 is undeniably a beautifully crafted piece of kit, but I have to confess I was disappointed by the look of the compressor section, with a rather small VU meter and fiddly knobs compared to a 'real' 1176. What is more, the original legending of the 1176 level controls has been lost, although I'm not sure level settings such as 48, 24 or 16 ever meant very much to anyone – it was more a case of knowing roughly where the pointers were pointing, the '10 to 2' position usually being a good starting point.

And instead of the pushbuttons there are rotary controls. But all the functionality of the buttons is retained, with the addition of true bypass as well as an 'in circuit but not compressing' setting, and an 'all buttons in' (British Mode) setting. The meter loses the rarely used +8 option but gains the ability to look at pre or post levels as well as gain reduction, again by virtue of a rotary selector.

The two sections are internally connected so as to make this a conventional recording channel, but they are also available separately, with logically arranged rear panel XLR audio connections for both sections. A front panel toggle selects Join or Split to this end.

The 610B section is everything I remember about the 2-610 – a big warm, clear character, enhancing beautifully. There are rear panel XLRs for mic and line inputs and a front panel instrument jack socket with dual selectable impedances. Doing a last-minute vocal on a long project where several vintage channels of the grey-blue variety had been used for the bulk of recording, the vocals suddenly came to life with an extra sparkle when using the 6176 as a recording channel. It was noticed immediately by all present, after finding the optimal of the two input impedance settings (the 500 setting with a U67 as it happened).

The ability to juggle the two gain controls for a variable amount of valve drive is a bonus, enabling the user to vary the tone subtly. And the switched 2-band EQ is very sweet, although lacks an overall bypass. One change from the 2-610 is the additional provision of a -15dB Pad toggle switch affecting the mic input only. This has been added as a result of user feedback – customers asking if they could buy a pad for the 2-610.



The B designation also reflects modifications made to the HT power supply, the addition of a MOSFET regulator that it is claimed keeps the voltage stable and reduces the supply's noise contribution. This unit is certainly exceptionally quiet for a valve design. However, as far as the distributor is aware there are no plans to change the design of the 2-610 or the M610 mono version.

In GR mode, the VU seems to whizz about slightly faster than an authentic 1176, and is less easily coaxed all the way to the left. A nice touch is that the backlight power is wired with the audio relay, so it only lights a couple of seconds after power up when the audio circuits become active. Although the meter looks less 'floaty', it seems the compressor characteristic is pretty authentic to the true 1176.

However, the two black-face originals I compared it to gave the signal a different tone, more 'honky' than the 6176. The 6176 also seemed to warm up the bass end and contains more very high frequencies than these old examples. And in the 'All' mode the roles seemed to reverse, with the 6176 more honky and the 1176s exhibiting more high frequency crunch, and a significantly different level output despite setting up with tones at the outset.

Additionally, the 6176 seemed to have more gain available on the output than these originals I was using, which can come in handy. The rear panel is equipped with a phono socket for use with the elusive 1176SA stereo interconnect box – it would be better if this facility was built in.

Anyone peering inside will feel they have got their money's worth – a handful of circuit boards house a colourful array including large transformers, sizeable capacitors, rows of resistors and two valves, one labelled as a USA GEC model.

Overall this is a terrific unit, and is priced very reasonably (about UK£1750 + VAT) when comparing it to other UA products. I still suspect a separate 1176 has a slight upper-hand if you want that authentic tone, but this is nevertheless a very nice compressor teamed with a truly wonderful mic preamp. ■

PROS

All the quality and features of half a 2-610 with improvements; convenience of a fantastic mic pre with a great compressor in a 2U.

CONS

1176 section possibly not quite authentic; small meter; no EQ bypass.

EXTRAS

The Windows 3.0 software release for the UAD-1 supports multiple UAD-1 cards in a single PC and the new



Cambridge EQ plug-in – the first Universal Audio plug-in for the UAD-1 platform to be sold separately. In addition to its 5-band, fully parametric EQ, Cambridge features high and low cuts with a variety of filter types and curves.

A new version of the UAD-1 card, called UAD-8 I/O, features an ADAT optical interface for sample rates from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

Contact

UNIVERSAL AUDIO, US:
Website: www.uaudio.com
UK, SCV London: +44 208 418 0778