

Mac PC What is it? Opto compressor plug-in for the UAD platform **PRICE: \$149**

CONTACT: Source Distribution, 020 8962 5080 WWW.uaudio.com

# UNIVERSAL AUDIO LA-3A



▲ Two knobs and a couple of switches – what more do you want from a compressor?

It's been some time coming, but Universal Audio finally pick up where the LA-2A left off, as they continue their retro emulations with the Teletronix LA-3A Audio Leveler...

► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

**PC:** UAD system, 256MB RAM, 125MB disk space, VST host (or RTAS using in-built Expansion adapter), Windows XP/Server 2003/Vista

**Mac:** UAD system, 256MB RAM, 125MB disk space, VST/AU host (or RTAS using in-built Expansion adapter), Mac OS X 10.4.0

► **TEST SYSTEM**

**Mac:** Apple Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, Logic Pro 7.2

**On the DVD**

**AUDIO DEMOS**  
Hear individually processed drums, followed by the whole kit, with the LA-3A muted briefly to show the difference

► **ALTERNATIVELY**

**BF Joe Meek Bundle**  
N/A >> N/A >> £171  
Pro Tools users can get both the Joe Meek SC2 Photo Optical Compressor and VC5 Meequalizer in plug-in form

**Waves Renaissance Compressor**  
N/A >> N/A >> \$200  
Plenty of options, easy to use and great-sounding

The latest update (v4.7) for Universal Audio's UAD platform includes trial versions of something old (the Urei LA-3A audio leveler) and something new (the Neve 88RS channel strip), with both emulations reinforcing their 'Analog Ears, Digital Minds' motto yet further. If you want the low-down on the Neve 88RS, check out the review in **cm116**, where we awarded it 9/10. This month, however, we're concentrating on the LA-3A.

When the UAD-1 DSP system was first launched, one of its big selling points was the inclusion of the Urei 1176 and Teletronix LA-2A compressors – both very different, but still hugely popular in hardware form. Universal Audio also manufacture analogue hardware reissues of several classic units (including the LA-3A) so with the revived company behind the UAD-1 card, these instantly became the 'official' software versions that everyone wanted. Strange, then, that the LA-3A got left on the sidelines...

In the interim, other plug-ins have come to the rescue (Bomb Factory's BF-3A springs to

mind), but none with the 'official' tag or cross-platform support.

## Electro music

The original LA-3A makes use of an electro-luminescent panel and photo-resistor to control gain reduction, and it's this circuitry's non-linear and signal-dependent attack/release characteristic that creates its signature sound. Unlike modern VCA designs, this is a simple two-knob affair with a variable threshold (Peak Reduction) and a manual gain make-up (Gain). You'll also notice two switches: one selects what the meters will show (gain reduction or output level) and can also disable the plug-in, while the other affects the compression ratio, with options to either limit or compress the signal. This latter switch was actually on the back of the original hardware unit, so it's nice to see the awesome power of software making it more accessible!

Given the simplicity of the controls, you might think the LA-3A is a bit of a one-trick pony, but this couldn't be further from the truth. In practice, its behaviour is very level-dependent. Starting with a vocal and some gentle settings, it's surprisingly good at smoothing out the peaks without destroying the transients. Putting the

plug-in to work on some blended backing vocals gives similar results, adding real 'glue' to the sound. Because the plug-in is phase-coherent, when using stereo signals you're not hindered in the way you are with the hardware equivalent.

Moving on to drums, the change in response as the compression is increased is quite surprising. There's almost a point at which the attack section changes greatly and the transients start to squash. Switching between Compress and Limit modes doesn't seem to have much effect at lower levels, but when you want to drive some overheads hard, the Limit option really comes into its own. The release characteristic is also of note – it's not particularly fast, but it has two stages and works really well for bringing up the decay of a sound.

A great addition to the UAD platform, much like the original hardware unit, the LA-3A is a great tool for bringing sounds into line. **cm**

**VERDICT**

**FOR**

- + Vintage opto sound
- + Simple interface
- + Easy access to limit/compress options
- + Good value
- + Lower CPU usage than 1176

**AGAINST**

- Small plug-in window
- UAD card required

At last, the LA-3A makes its UAD debut, and it's exactly the corking compressor you'd expect. With plug-ins like this, the UAD platform is looking tastier all the time

**RATING**

9

## Numbers game

The Teletronix LA-2A and LA-3A, and the Urei 1176 and LA-4A all have a closely related heritage, and with Bill Putnam's UREI company owning the designs, it's no surprise that three of these classics have now become software plug-ins produced by Universal Audio, which is now his sons' company. However, each compressor remains very distinctive, and here's why...

The LA-2A uses an electro-luminescent and photo-resistor gain circuit. Combined with its transformer input and output stage, and valve amplifier and sidechain circuits, it's great for fattening up sounds. The 1176 uses an FET gain-reduction circuit, and its super-fast attack and release make it a popular choice for vocals and drums.



▲ Spot the difference! This is the original hardware version of the LA-3A that the UAD emulation is modelled on

The LA-3A improves the LA-2A's gain reduction circuit by making it react faster and it also does away with expensive valve circuitry. Finally, the LA-4A introduces ICs in the input, output and control stages, but many say that these don't improve on the LA-3A's sound.