

BELGIUM

World first for Belgian studio

After an impressive demo, Brussels-based Electric City becomes the first mastering studio in the world to use the Analoguetube AT-101 compressor-limiter, reports **Marc Maes**

Over the past 15 years, Electric City, headed by Alan Ward, has established itself as a top-notch mastering facility thanks to the combination of Ward's mastering skills and the use of high-quality equipment. Clients from Belgium and abroad are attracted by the signature style which makes Electric City stand out, for mastering, audio live recording and mixing, film editing and DVD creation.

The Analoguetube AT-101 (the AT stands for attenuator, the 101 for the left attenuator channel), a remake of the famous Fairchild 670 limiter, was redeveloped by Simon Saywood, senior technical engineer with London's Metropolis Studios. A first pre-production version was put on display during the 2008 AES Convention in San Francisco.

"That's where we discovered Analoguetube and we were immediately impressed," says Mathijs Indesteege, product support engineer with Joystick Audio, the distributor of Analoguetube in the Benelux and France. "We're always quite selective in the brands we distribute and the people we work with – people with passion for their gear."

Saywood started with the Analoguetube project in 2003 when he saw that a vintage Fairchild 670 unit at the studio failed due to a blown control output and input transformer, and a broken power supply. "The original Fairchild 670 was launched in late '50s and today these units are very rare and exchange hands for large sums of money," Saywood explains. "We saw problems with damaged insulation of the wiring, transformers that had gone open circuit, dead power supplies... all of these problems were being sort of half fixed with modern-day components."



The Analoguetube AT-101 is a remake of the Fairchild 670 limiter

Saywood decided to start from scratch and develop an exact replica of the famous stereo limiter – he soon found that part of the problem was that some parts were now obsolete. "I had to build and manufacture some components to develop the product to make it work," he continues. "The Achilles heel of the AT-101 (like the original Stereo Fairchild 670) was the 6386 type gain reduction tubes, with eight of them being responsible in part for the sound and the way the compressor functions. Without them there was no point in making the product."

The solution was to redevelop exactly the same tubes, a job he assigned to Slovakian tube manufacturer JJ-Electronic. It took many hundreds of hours correlating static plate current figures against a large quantity of original 6386 tubes. "There were a few broken eggs along the way," Saywood explains, "but it was well worth it and after two

years of development the 6386LPG tube was born and was presented simultaneously with the AT-101 at AES 2008."

"When you build a product like this from the ground up, you might as well build it properly," he adds, stressing that the Analoguetube AT-101's forte is "consistency, because each unit sounds exactly the same as the other; availability, with all the components of the unit freely available; and longevity. The AT-101 comes with a lifetime warranty", he enthuses. "The AT-101 uses the original circuit, all original parts (including the new-generation 6386 tubes) and controls of the original 670 units. It is built using standard classic wiring techniques, original wiring turrets and super audio passive component technology. The AT-101 displays all the classic signs of the original – lift at the top and bottom when driven slightly, gluing the image together."

Joystick Audio was persuaded by the AT-101 limiter-compressor's unique qualities and ordered the first three units from Analoguetube – one was presented as a demo unit to Ward, who was very impressed. "I don't think I've ever heard a beautiful tone like this machine in any other machine," he says. "It has the wonderful quality of making everything come together as if it is in one room."

After testing the AT-101, Ward suggested to Saywood ("dialogue with both manufacturer and distributor is crucial") to include a bypass option. Saywood appreciates the feedback rendered by Joystick Audio and its clients. "We want to know who wants to buy the product, find out about the person, the studio and music application – I would hate to sell something like this and for it not be used," adds Saywood. In addition to the bypass switch modification, he is also implementing a separate gain reduction stage and a separate AC threshold stage as well as Mid-Side switching.

Earlier this year, Ward decided to invest in the AT-101, thus becoming the first mastering facility in the world to acquire the unit. "Mastering is all about intensive listening so this application was a real road test for the AT-101 – any imperfection in the signal

chain would come to the surface," continues Saywood.

"Hearing what a compressor can do is amazingly important – that's why I have a big set of PMC BB5XB speakers to hear all the details," echoes Ward. "What I'm doing is the last creative stage where you can get all the subtleties from the machines. The greater bulk of what I'm doing goes through an analogue stage using compressors and equalisers – then I convert back to digital and run it through the Weiss EQ1-MKII-LP-DYN equaliser, Weiss DS1-MKIII compressor and TC M6000. With the AT-101 I can combine the best of both analogue and digital worlds maintaining high quality throughout the whole process."

At press time, Ward was using the AT-101 compressor to remaster a 50-CD set of Flemish singer Will Tura for Sony Music Belgium: the vast collection of archive tapes, original recordings and recent digital tracks were remastered with the Analoguetube AT-101 as a key tool. In the nearby Synsound studio, sound engineer Dan Lacksman is recording material for a '60s/'70s project – and expects further mastering with the AT-101 unit. 📧

www.analoguetube.com

www.electriccity.be

www.joystick.be



Alan Ward at Electric City, first user of the AT-101

MicW

Professional Microphones

N Series Nickel Diaphragm

MicW N Series Microphones

Nickel Diaphragm Technology delivering pure and un-coloured sound

See us at IBC 2010 in RAI Amsterdam, Booth 8.D03.

www.mic-w.com sales@mic-w.com

