

# TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

## **ROD ARGENT**

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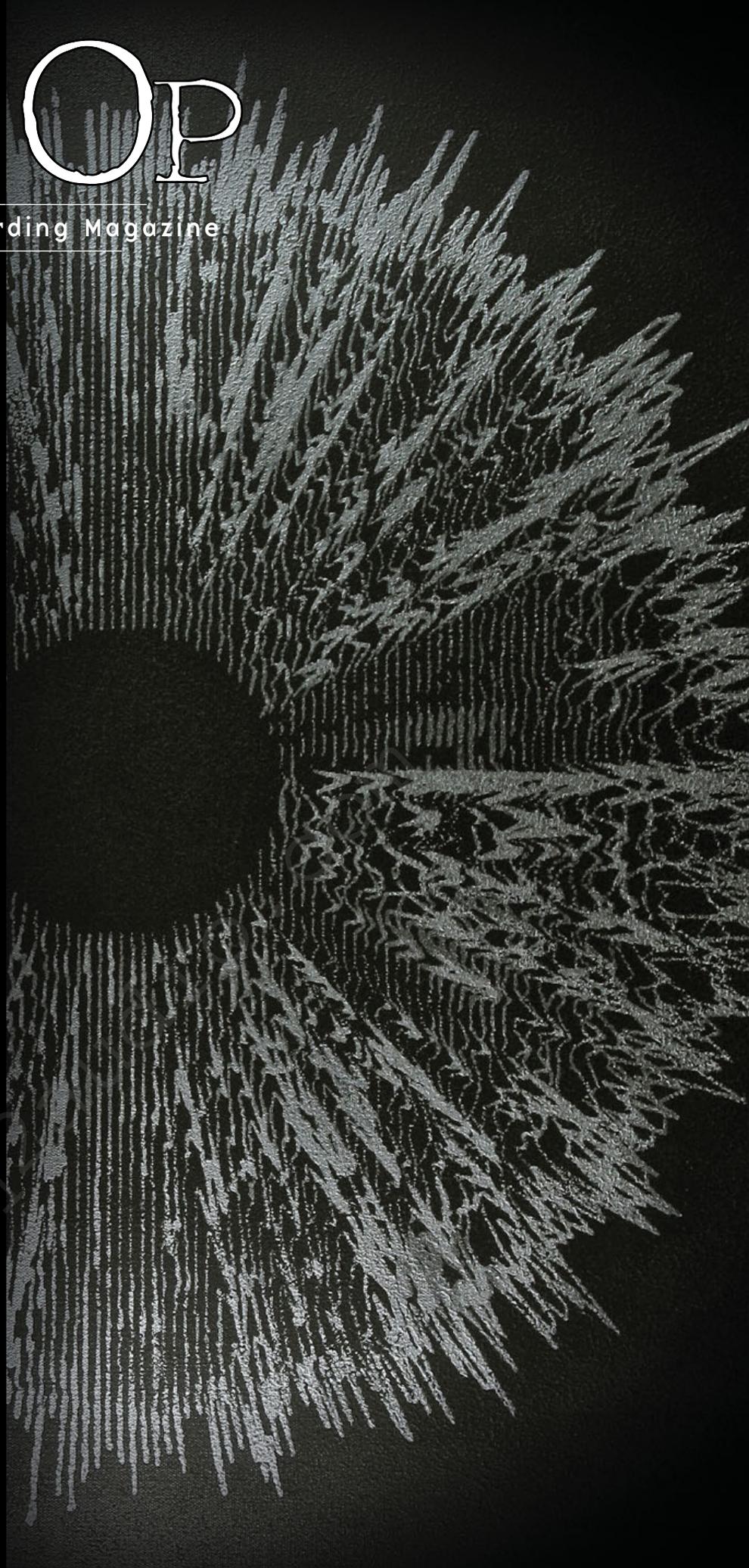
*New Plug-in Ideas in Behind the Gear*

## **DIY SPRING REVERB**

## **GEAR REVIEWS**

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It's safe to say that Universal Audio's in-house plug-in emulations are in a league all their own, and *UAD API 2500* certainly continues that tradition. It's versatile, unique, and adds the punch and character you associate with API products. And at 1/10th of the price of the original hardware unit, I'd suggest giving it a go. (\$299; [www.uaudio.com](http://www.uaudio.com)) —Dave Ceminara <[daveceminara@gmail.com](mailto:daveceminara@gmail.com)>

## Q2 Audio

### *F765 Compex 500-series compressor*

You may already know the story behind the legendary ADR Compex dynamics processor, which for many of us, is noted mostly for the drum sound on Led Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks." Q2 Audio, the manufacturers of the official ADR Compex F760X-RS reissue [*Tape Op* #108], recently began selling a 500-series version with almost the same feature set. This compact module does not have the expander function, but its compressor/limiter mimics that of its older sibling. I would urge you now to read Chris Koltay's excellent review of the F760X-RS, because my comments here will be more concise.

The *F765* module is super solid, being fully encased in steel, except for a small cutout where the transformer pokes through the side wall. A beefy gain-reduction meter is on top, and despite the unit being feature-packed, the controls are well laid out, and none of them are difficult to access. As with the F760X-RS, the *F765's* controls are very interactive and sometimes deliver tones that are unexpected (but still welcomed) at certain settings, so the clear layout and labeling are especially appreciated.

This compressor/limiter isn't a simple box you will plug into, and be off and running right away. There is more to it than simple utility, and a look at the manual is necessary to understand its functions, setup, and capabilities — and even after that, it can still surprise you. I would need to spend ample time running all sorts of things through it to ultimately be an authority on the device, but it became quickly clear that the *F765* has a great deal of depth and is worth exploring at length. That said, we seated a pair of *F765* modules into an API 500-series rack, and ran some audio from the previous night's session through them as a test drive.

It didn't take long to get useable settings on a variety of things, but we found it more and more fun as we pushed the units around a bit and "abused" them. We loved how dirty we could get them to sound. Some compressors create nasty artifacts when pushed too far. Others, like the Empirical Labs Distressor [*Tape Op* #32] and Kush Audio Tweaker [#107] were designed to be pushed, and they excel in this regard. Same deal here. The *F765* is a solid utility compressor and a creative tone machine all in one. With its ability to rein in dynamics and add musical distortion, even when these effects are barely audible, this processor can knit elements together while really adding something special to the mix.

We ran a vocal through one module and found that it could be very subtle sounding and unobtrusive, but also gritty and dirty in a very musical way. My first thought was to compress the lead vocal in parallel, and blend in some of this gritty compressed track. A version of this strategy was used on some old Motown recordings, and it certainly adds an extra energy to the track. Of course, to do this, you need the right dirt and the right compressor, and in the case of the *F765*, it is both of those things. The vocal thing was a surprise, because really what I was anxious to run through these modules was drums. You get into some new territory, and if you have done much listening to the classics, you know the sound.

It'd be happy to have and use the *F765* on just about anything. Clean compression settings can be used on sources like vocals or acoustic instruments, when you don't want to hear audible dynamics control. Bass sounded great after I futzed about with it for a moment. Or you can get creative with the gain control and the rest of the features to paint some nice textures and have the compression be more present in the mix.

From good, clean, gentle taming — to real color-generating compression — the *Q2 Audio F765* module can add as little or as much personality as you want to dial in. I probably wouldn't want to waste all that color and vibe, and therefore, I would be less likely to use the *F765* as a utility compressor. Save your plug-ins for that, and create something special with this little beast. (\$1025 street; [www.q2audio.com](http://www.q2audio.com)) —GS

## Black Box Analog Design

### *HG-2 tube processor*

So, what we have here is a big (3RU-height), heavy (26 lb) black box filled with tubes and transformers, from a company called Black Box Analog Design. That's a lot to like already, and I haven't even told you what it does yet.

I'd been extremely curious to check out the *HG-2* ever since I first saw it mentioned online awhile back. Robert Wainscott and Eric Racy, the brains behind BBAD, were happy to send over a unit for review, and I put it right to work in my mastering chain. The initial half-hour test session was enough to convince me there was no way I was giving this thing back.

So, what does it do? BBAD bills it as "your mix bus's best friend." It can add harmonics, increase RMS level, tame peaks (gently or not so gently), and do full-on distortion if that's your thing. It's mainly designed to process complex 2-channel mixes, but naturally, it works great on submixes or individual channels too.

The heart of the *HG-2* (Holy Grail? Harmonics Generator? Hits Guaranteed?) is its two gain stages, Pentode and Triode. Pentode feeds the Triode, and you can get a wide range of tones just playing these two gain stages against each other and/or against the output.

That alone would be cool enough, but there's also a parallel saturation circuit, enabling you to blend in any amount of distortion (from barely audible to completely ridiculous) with the main signal. And you can choose from two different types of tubes for this circuit, one voiced more aggressively than the other. And, you can choose to have this parallel distortion be either broadband or targeted at the low or high frequencies. Nifty!

Besides that, there's also a simple Air switch, which adds a smooth, high-frequency boost. The boost is at a fixed level, but you can adjust that level via an internal trimmer. I'm the rare mastering engineer who thinks "air" is overrated, so I was initially dubious about this feature, but hey, I was wrong. More on that later.

Before I dropped the *HG-2* into my rack, I opened it up for a look inside. I am a very untechnical person; I can barely tell a capacitor from a resistor, but I can tell you that the inside of the *HG-2* is a thing of elegant, simple beauty. It looks lovingly assembled, the faceplate is super thick, and the whole thing seems totally bulletproof.

So, tell us how it sounds already. Hang on, before we get to that, let's talk about the ergonomics of this thing. Because the ergonomics are great. It's laid out in a really smart fashion. There are big knobs for Pentode, Triode, Saturation, and Output. Unity gain is Saturation off, Pentode and Triode at noon, and Output at about 2–3 o'clock. In practice, I found a good starting point was usually Pentode at 2:00, Triode at 1:00, Output pulled back to about noon. You can do that with one hand motion in 2 seconds. The bypass switch is located right under the Output knob. You can toggle this with one finger while adjusting the output level — super helpful for doing level-matched comparisons. Likewise, the in/out and type switches for the Saturation circuit can be switched with a finger while you're adjusting the knob. Maybe this stuff doesn't sound like much in print, but in practice, it's all really useful, and evidence of smart design by actual working engineers.

Anyway, the sound. At unity, it's very transparent; you can barely tell it's there. Once you start pushing the gains around though, the fun starts. I'm going to try really hard to avoid overused buzzwords here, but basically... big, open, wide, rich, vibrant, lively. That's how it sounds.



**ROYER**

**GREG SAYS**

"My favorite kind of tool in the studio is one that I don't have to think about, where you put it up and it instantly makes things sound better. Royer mics have been getting me there for almost 15 years. Once I tried them, I couldn't be without them."

**Greg Wells**  
Producer/Engineer (Keith Urban, Katy Perry, Twenty One Pilots, One Republic, Mika)

**ROYER**

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