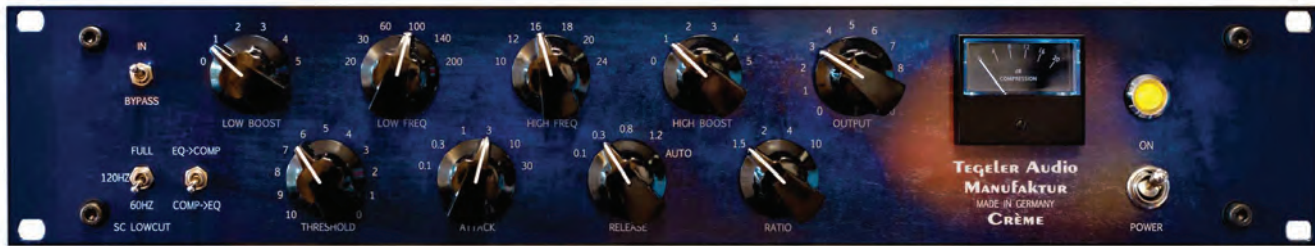


TEGELER AUDIO MANUFAKTUR CRÈME

Smooth, Transparent Hardware Bus Compressor



Crème has a dedicated EQ section with 5 LF and 6 HF frequency choices (boost only).

Tegel Audio Manufaktur's aptly named Crème is a 2-channel line-level audio processor designed to be a "finishing touch" for stereo mixes or across buses/stems. Handmade in Germany, Crème consists of a stereo equalizer and compressor processing chain with ganged sets of controls for adjusting both the left and right channels' equalizer and compressor sections together; the channels cannot be adjusted independently.

Crème is presented in a stylish, padded, wooden treasure chest adorned with Gothic-style latches and hinges. The unit itself comes in an all-steel 2U case with a built-in linear power supply, plus an internal switch for choosing between 120 or 240 VAC mains operation. The rear IEC power receptacle indicated "220-240-VAC mains only," but the unit was shipped with a U.S. power cable, so I checked that the internal switch was set to 120 VAC.

Internal construction is good, with surface-mount components on a single main circuit board and audio switched using Panasonic 12-volt relays. The main board is interconnected to the front panel's circuit board using two ribbon cables. The front panel's circuit board has control pots custom-made in Germany and Lorlin Electronics rotary switches with gold-plated contacts. The pots and switches are soldered to the board, and the controls' threaded collars are used to attach the entire board assembly directly to the unit's front panel. I noticed during normal usage that the front panel bends inward and flexes the circuit board. This lack of rigidity is because the unit's cover is not directly attached to the front panel anywhere. However, the cover is screwed to the cabinet everywhere else using small machine screws.

There is a very useful front panel switch for changing the chain order. It is easy to quickly audition Crème's process with the equalizer either before or after the compressor in the chain.

There are also front panel switches for mains on/off, master bypass and the SC Low Cut switch selects between Full (or none), 60Hz or 120Hz sidechain highpass filter frequencies. There is no rear panel sidechain access jack.

The 2-band equalizer section has four smooth rotary switch control knobs for the low- and high-frequency shelving sections. These are smooth, first-order, 6dB/octave filters with six frequency choices for each. You can only boost up to 5 dB in 1dB steps. The boost controls start at "0," which suffices for flat; there are no separate hardware bypass switches.

The low-frequency choices are: 20, 30, 60, 100, 140 and 200 Hz; the high-frequency choices are: 10, 12, 16, 18, 20 and 24 kHz.

Crème's compressor section is a soft-knee type that uses a pair of THAT Corp 2180C Blackmer Pre-Trimmed IC VCA chips. The unit also uses THAT Corp line receivers and T1 line drivers—the unit forgoes transformers as the design goal is for sonic transparency.

A single, small VU meter reads the combined (summed) gain reduction of both channels but moves opposite from typical gain reduction meters. The needle rests on 0dB VU with no reduction and moves to the right with compression.

The compressor's front-panel Ratio control has 1.5, 2, 4 and 10:1 choices, and, for repeatability, the Threshold control has detents and is simply marked from 10 to 0; 0 being the highest threshold for no compression. I also liked the detents on the Output/make-up gain control. There is plenty of

TRY THIS

The left and right channels of Crème work great to lock "dynamically" a lead vocal with its double track. I split a stereo insert path I use for stereo buses as two mono inserts and set up the left channel for the lead and then routed the double track vocal to the right channel. Once I have the desired compression set on the lead vocal track, the (similarly recorded) double track vocal takes on the same dynamics.

PRODUCT SUMMARY

COMPANY: Tegeler Audio Manufaktur

WEB: tegeler-audio-manufaktur.de/

PRODUCT: Crème Bus Compressor and Mastering Equalizer

PRICE: \$1,799 MSRP

PROS: Smooth and transparent processing

CONS: Limited controls and average mechanical build.

level available, making Crème an excellent choice for tracking and/or low-level individual tracks in a mix. The Attack control has: 0.1, 0.3, 1, 3, 10 and 30ms choices, while the Release control offers 0.1, 0.3, 0.8 and 1.2 seconds, plus an Auto Release position.

STEREO MASTER PROCESSING

My first use was for a full stereo mix recorded at 44.1 kHz. I wanted to pre-condition the mix's dynamics for subsequent limiting so as not to have a single processor do all the "heavy lifting." Using the signal generator in Pro Tools 12.6.1, I confirmed that, using PSPAudioware VU 3.0.6 meter plug-ins, a 1kHz tone at 0 dB (ref -18dBFS) coming out of a stereo hardware insert from my Avid interface returned at 0 dB. With Threshold at 0, Output level at 0 and both EQ boost controls at 0, the two plug-in meters on the output and input paths matched exactly!

For this rock/pop song, I first set the SC Low Cut to Full (or none) and set the EQ before the Compressor in the chain. This particular song has deep bass, so I boosted at 200 Hz in the low frequencies by 1 dB to fatten up the bright sound of the loud lead vocal. Before doing any boosting in the high frequencies, I wanted to set up the compressor section. I chose 10ms Attack, Auto release and a 2:1 compression ratio.

With Threshold set to 2, the loud kick and bass triggered too much compression, so I switched in the SC filter to 120Hz position and saw the amount of compression decrease. Next, I tried switching the chain order so that the EQ followed the compressor. The 120Hz SC Cut and the EQ after the compressor allowed resetting both Threshold (up to almost 3) and Output level set at 2. There is no switch

to read output level, and the GR meter was showing 2dB to 4dB average compression on big vocal and track peak moments.

I boosted 18 kHz by 5 dB. This high-frequency section is my favorite part of Crème, and I could hear the change as a pleasant "openness" of the overall sound—not particularly bright, just nicer-sounding. Moving the frequency down to 12 or 16 kHz and applying boost gave me a noticeably brighter sound that this track didn't need. The 18kHz boost added a smooth, airy quality. For quick A/B checking, I wish there were separate EQ in/out switching, as I feel like I will wear out the boost rotary switches quickly cranking them back and forth between boost and 0 (or flat).

DRUM BUS AND VOCALS

I next tried Crème on a stereo drum bus that included the kick. Even with 16 dB of gain reduction on kick and snare hits, the unit remained clean-sounding. I used the 60Hz SC filter, EQ after the Compressor, Threshold at 6, Attack at 3ms and Release at 0.2ms. I boosted 12 kHz by 5 dB to make up the high-frequency dulling caused by this huge amount of gain reduction. This is the classic drum "squash" effect done in a modern-sounding way.

I also liked compressing vocals with Crème—again it is very clean—nearly surgical, transparent and unobtrusive. Heavy compression introduces no weird artifacts, and I found both lead vocals and backing vocals to be easily controlled using up to 6 dB of compression, a 10:1 ratio and a slow attack time at 30ms to keep the vocals shiny.

A GOOD POLISHER!

Crème is a worthwhile stereo bus processor with a clear and clean sound. I would rely on it for processing unobtrusively even when wound up to the extreme. I do wish it had a few more controls/options, such as the ability to cut with the equalizer, EQ section bypass switches, and a larger gain reduction meter that also read output level. But as it comes, it is a precision piece of well-engineered processing that sounds great and is enjoyable to use. ■

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