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Bellari RP562



Following his look at the Bellari Rp533, Andrew Bailey went on to test the Bellari RP562 Studio Tube Sonic Exciter to see if the American manufacturer's marketing strategy for producing cost-effective combinations bears out.

The RP562 Studio Tube Sonic Exciter is a simple-looking tube exciter, with a sub -300 pound price tag. It has all the features of the exciter section within the RP533 but with a few hidden surprises, giving it enough diversification to make it an item in its own right.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The system is supplied as a 1U rack module in the same flamboyant brushed gold livery, with large, retro control knobs, and the same good, old, quality build, common across the range. This all leads to a rugged, usable feel about the whole thing. The manual gives a good account of sonic excitement and a reason to choose tube technology for this job, yet there is no mention that the tube is from Bellari's own Premium brand, in this case the 7025/LCC63.

A documentation of the signal path fails to appear too, but this is straightforward enough, once the cover is off; the input signal has the sub-bass separated out by a frequency crossover-type filter, amplified using the sub-level control. What's left of the signal moves through to be treated by the bottom and definition circuits.

FRONT AND REAR PANELS

The rear panel reveals the addition of a sub-woofer output. All the expected connection options are available: XLR and quarter-inch jacks are offered on stereo ins and outs, depending on the operating environment. There are no side chain points, so such a configuration is achieved in the normal way; from the mixer effect send to the inputs, back out of the outputs and into the mixer-effect receives.

All the functionality is controlled from the front panel. Although it seems illogical in its layout, it is deceptively easy. The sub-woofer output and the stereo signal outputs are both to the left of the unit, with two round VU output meters to the right, along with the main power switch.

The sub-woofer section comprises a sub-frequency control and a sub-level control. The sub-frequency control is a variable low-pass design which sets the highest frequency allowed out of the sub-woofer jack on the rear panel to anywhere between 35Hz and 200Hz. The sub-level control is a simple amplitude control, offering between infinity and +20dB. Between the two sections is a bypass button labelled "Active" which, according to the manual: 'Engages and disengages the RP562 Process. When out, the unit is by-passed.'

OPERATION

In operation, this proved to be not entirely true. When set to the bypass position, the switch disables the exciter section, while the bass separation function for the sub-woofer output remains active, allowing the unit to function as a crossover in its own right. This output is reflected in the VU meters which bounce around a fairly insignificant level when the unit is by-passed, while displaying a healthy level when the unit is active.

The stereo outputs are controlled by the two remaining rotary dials; the 'bottom' dial controls the amount of low frequency cut or boost, whilst the 'definition' dial controls high frequencies.

Boosting the low range by means of the 'bottom' control lifts a section of the mix from about 125Hz up to about 800Hz into the stereo outs, giving the higher frequencies further roots to work from. An aside to this control is that there is a zero to turn spectrum spread from mid-range to bass, as well as amplitude control.

Unfortunately, working in this way does leave a gap in the mix between about 800Hz and 1.5kHz, meaning that this unit is best placed to work through the effects sends, so that the missing frequencies can be placed correctly in the mix through other channels.

Inserted into the main signal path, the unit needs a different approach - still delicate but not nearly so subtle, so that too much signal doesn't get sent out. Taking a source signal closer to the origin and clarifying it within a mixdown was easy to achieve with subtle use of the controls. Vocals, pianos and, perhaps, acoustic guitar work can be treated to excellent effect with this unit, bringing out the warmth and clarity in subtle craftwork. Even at the end of the signal chain, with suitable EQ'ing to compensate for weaknesses, the unit performed a great job of separating the individual sounds in a mix, adding breadth and depth to what had been a rather flat mix.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the unit performed with speed, ease, and more careful control, and the effects on piano, vocals, and a musical mix were very pleasing. Initial noise level worries were unfounded and, although the noise floor is measured at -78dB, which may not measure up, it proved to be adequate for many jobs and was only noticeable with a definition boost. Splitting the frequencies as described may be more of a live sound technique, but I imagine that, with the natural crossover functions, this unit will perform extremely well in a variety of situations and may well find favour in the sound system sector where its ruggedness and ability to reinforce certain frequencies will be appreciated.

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