



The **Broadcasters' Desktop Resource**

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Checking It Out The SMOOTH Microphone Processor



By Mike Erickson

[October 2023] Just as with speakers, professionals select microphones based on their personal preferences and efforts to create a signature “sound” product. When their favorite microphone is combined with the right pre-amp processor, the result can be quite ear pleasing.

One size fits all.

It is an old term, but one that has been familiar in the broadcasting industry for a long time. You wanted a console, you had four or five sizes to choose from, that was it. Audio processing? You had to literally hack the box to make it sound the way you want.

The same could be said of microphone processing. A couple of decades ago you were rolling your own.

PROCESSING THE MICROPHONE

Then came the age of Valley People and Symmetrix and a microphone processor was at home at most radio stations around the world.

But the algorithms in the microphone processor were not tuned specifically for any one type of microphone. A set of controls was given to the user and they had to understand the characteristics of the microphone to set them correctly.

Thus it was intriguing when Angry Audio tossed its hat into the ring of audio processing a little while ago, announcing they were coming out with a mic processor for a specific microphone, the Shure SM- 7B.

I own an SM-7B and am a big fan of the SM-7B microphone. When I was at CBS Radio in New York we installed them at all the stations in the cluster, including CBS-FM. And those who watch the documentary about Z-100 in the 80s on YouTube will see plenty of SM-7B love as Z-100 was outfitted a bunch of them.

CHECKING IT OUT

It did not take long from me to arrange a demo to see what Cornelius Gould and Mike Dosch had come up with – and see if it was better than the venerable (and now unobtainable) 528E I voicetrack with every day.



The Angry Audio SMOOTH Microphone Processor

The very first thing I heard out of the box and after setup was actually what I did not hear.

There was a definite lack of hiss in the pre-amplifier.

CLEAN AUDIO

Those who know the 7 family know that it needs a lot of gain, and some pre-amplifiers cannot keep up, which is why Cloud Lifter has become part of the voiceover lexicon.

So, as soon as I unpacked it, I interfaced the SMOOTH directly into the production studio console in the same fashion as the 528E's output, adjusted the input for 3 to 4 bars of gain reduction (that ought to do it) and set the output for more than enough level into the console.

Then, without adjusting anything else, I had a “whoa” moment talking into the Shure.

THE SAME BUT TOTALLY DIFFERENT

It was like being introduced to an old friend for the first time again.

To repeat: I had not made any adjustments and already what I was hearing had more heft and life than the 528E.

I played with the controls – the De-Esser and Gate are some of the best I have heard in any processor – and then set out to voicetrack my afternoon show. Of course, to hear the progress immediately I threw in a few tracks on the air late at night, so I knew what to expect the next day.

Up against advertisements that had been recorded with the 528E – which, do not get me wrong, sounded good – the SMOOTH brought me up front and added weight to my voice. I was not crunched, I was not squashed. It was just right. I went to bed very happy with the sound of everything.

GETTING TO KNOW THE SMOOTH

I used the SMOOTH for the next couple of days in production.

Finally, I went to take it out and, upon protest, said it would be back Monday. But first, I wanted to make some test recordings at home of the SM-7B (1) flat, (2) with my dbx microphone processor and (3) with the SMOOTH. The dbx microphone processor I have at home is just about a year old and is not on 24/7, so it is still relatively at spec.

As I listened, I appreciated the sound of the dbx microphone processor, and was reminded of why I liked it better than the 528E. Then I recorded audio clips of the microphone without processing, with the dbx and then with the SMOOTH, reading the same copy in all three samples.

CLEANLY, CLEARLY THE WINNER

With the same settings I had in the production studio, the SMOOTH was the winner.

Using the controls on the dbx, I could mimic the SMOOTH to give me the heft, but that came at a price of very aggressive compression, which was a show stopper.

My only minor beef is that the controls are different than you would expect: For example, the pre-amplifier gain is all the way to the right side. But honestly, I am nitpicking at this point and two minutes with the device and you will be at home with it. Cornelius' algorithms do the magic and the voice literally comes to life.

Finally, there is a microphone processor that brings out the best sound from a specific microphone.

MAGIC FOR THE EARS

In short, when all the algorithms are carefully tuned in DSP for the response of a particular microphone, magic can happen.

Check out Angry Audio's site for mounting hardware so you can have two side-by-side in a 19"-1RU rackspace.



And coming soon there also will be a sister microphone processor – the Rebel – for those who prefer the Electro-Voice line.

If you are an SM-7B house or a voiceover talent that likes the SM-7B (or the SM-5) the SMOOTH should be your radar.

Mike Erickson has extensive experience in audio processing at CBS and Wheatstone. He now is enjoying working in a small mid-western market doing production, voicetracking, and audio processing support. You can contact Mike at ericksonupnorth@gmail.com

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