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# ProAudio Review

The Review Resource for Sound Professionals

## Incredible-Sounding Analog! APB-DynaSonics Spectra-T



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by Andrew Roberts

# APB-DynaSonics Spectra-T Analog Console

This sound reinforcement board offers impeccably crafted dynamics and integrity

There are those in the sound reinforcement field who think that the analog console is primed to go the way of the steam locomotive; they claim that the hammer of technology has started to attach the coffin lid on our old analog friend. But we may want to check with the folks at APB-DynaSonics before the analog console is interred. They have founded an upstart company based on one premise: building premium analog consoles.

Chuck Augustowski, John Petrucelli and Taz Bhogal founded APB in late 2004 (the company acronym comes from the first letter of their respective surnames).

And their impressive collective experience furthers the capability and integrity of the modern analog console.

## FEATURES

APB to date produces two variations of the Spectra model: the T and the C. The principal difference between them is the channel EQ.

## FAST FACTS

### APPLICATIONS:

Live sound, houses-of-worship, theaters, clubs

### KEY FEATURES:

Fully sweepable highs and lows on the channel EQ; four dedicated stereo strips; 10 auxes; eight VCAs; four matrix outs; LCR+Mono main outs; Burr-Brown mic preamps

### PRICE:

Starts at \$15,500

### CONTACT:

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🌐 www.apb-dynasonics.com



The T has fully sweepable highs and lows, while the C has more limited EQ options with selectable frequencies for the same ranges. The console can be framed from 24 - 56 mono channels. I evaluated a 24-channel version of the Spectra-T (\$15,500 as reviewed)

The chassis size of my review unit was only 31.17-inches deep, 9.75-inches tall, 47.57-inches wide and 125 pounds, yet this console has an incredible feature density. It is a very comprehensive desk with features that should appeal to pro engineers at either end of the snake. It has full-featured mono channel strips, four dedicated stereo strips, 10 auxes, eight VCAs, four matrix outs and LCR+Mono main outs.

The Spectra-T's mono input channels feature Burr-Brown preamps, XLR and 1/4-inch TRS inputs, a direct out (1/4-inch TRS) and an unbalanced insert point (1/4-inch TRS). There is a line switch on the strip that can select either the XLR or 1/4-inch TRS inputs as line level. There is also an individual phantom power switch, a pad switch (-26 dB), a polarity reversal switch, an input gain control and a direct out pre-switch. There are several options as to where the signal can be tapped when pre is selected for the direct out: at the mic pre, the insert send (post-HPF) or pre-fade/post-EQ & insert.

The Spectra's EQ section features a sweepable high-pass filter (20 - 400 Hz, 12 dB per octave) that can be activated via pushbutton. The insert point is downstream of the HPF, so

the HPF is followed by an insert activation button. The high frequency control sweeps from 800 Hz - 16 kHz with up to 15 dB of cut/boost. It also has a switch to choose either a shelf- or bell-type EQ. It should be noted that the high and low EQ controls feature a variable width when in bell mode. That means the Q BW is wider on boost (where you are more apt to be adding coloration) and narrower on cuts (for more precise feedback control or resonance reduction). The hi-mid control ranges from 400 Hz - 8 kHz, also with 15 dB of cut/boost. The

hi-mid, similar to the high and low controls, has a pushbutton to narrow the width from 1 octave - 1/3 octave. The low-mid ranges from 100 Hz - 2 kHz and has comparable range and width functions to the high-mid. The low frequency control ranges from 20 Hz - 400 Hz and, like the high control, has 15 dB of cut/boost and a shelving/bell switch.

The auxiliary section on the Spectra is very flexible. It has 10 sends with four of them being straight mono and the other six able to be grouped in stereo pairs. Atop the Aux section are two switches for pre-source selection. This means you can choose between pre-fader and pre-EQ for your pre-source aux sends. It should also be noted that the default pre-EQ source is set to post-insert. It can be configured, however, to be pre-insert or pre-HPF. You'll also encounter sends 5 through 10 grouped in pairs. Each pair has a stereo button that converts the top send in the pair to a pan control and the bottom send to a gain control.

The channel's main bus assignment can send the post fade input signal to either a L-R/C configuration or LCR. The pan control in L-R/C mode acts in standard fashion to allow operation in conventional stereo mode or mono. The pan in LCR mode converts to a blend control. Hard left sends the channel's signal only to the left buss. Twelve o'clock sends it only to the center buss and full right only to the right buss. This would be useful in a house-of-worship scenario where the PA had



independent left and right clusters (for music) and a center cluster (for speech).

The channel fader is a 100 mm VCA slider that operates in tandem with eight VCA group assignment buttons, four mute group assignments, a local mute switch and a small 6-segment LED signal display. The local mute switch is internally illuminated (nice!) and is adjacent to an LED indicating a remote mute when one of the mute groups or VCAs is muted (super nice!). The section also features an internally illuminated solo button and a VCA status LED.

There are four stereo channels on the Spectra-T. They have balanced TRS inputs (left and right) and a pair of unbalanced RCA inputs. These left and right inputs can be treated as stereo pairs or as two distinct mono signals as the strip has a switch for split track operation (where each side of the incoming signal can be treated differently with regards to blending and aux distribution). The stereo channels have a scaled back EQ section with three fixed bands and a variable low (switched between 60 – 120 Hz). Aux distribution, post-fade routing and the fader section are all similar to the mono channels.

The Master section on the Spectra-T has an impressive array of controls. As mentioned before, the board has eight VCA groups, each with a 100mm fader. Add these to the similar faders for all the aux masters and the main output and you have a lot of VCA faders on a small patch of real estate. The board has a 15 x 4 matrix that is remarkably flexible. It should be noted the matrix and main output all appear on balanced XLR connectors (which are mirrored to allow easy access to the cable release tabs) and have insert jacks, too. The board has mono alternate outputs (good for feeding broadcast media) and alternate stereo record outputs. The Spectra also has a powerful bevy of headphone monitoring features and a very impressive bank of master LED ladders. The board, in a nod to pro users, comes with onboard redundant power supplies. It also features true modular construction, allowing easy component removal for servicing.

### | IN USE

My first use of the Spectra-T was a recording for TV broadcast. We used the board to mix an orchestra and choir to a two-track feed. We were very impressed with the clean images and ample headroom the board displayed with a slew of condenser mics and a line-level feed from a pricey stereo tube mic preamp. I felt like the console's preamps rivaled those of the designer outboard piece.

I next passed the console off to my colleague Trevor Higgins for a tough sound reinforce-

ment assignment. He was mixing a large orchestra made up of Russian stringed instruments (balalaikas, domras, etc.). This group can be technically challenging, but midway through the job he sent me a text message stating, "Hassle factor 3, love of console 10." Say no more. He said the board provided a brilliant house mix, an awesome aux-fed stereo recording and two stage monitor mixes with ease.

I later got to use the desk with my standard PA and a familiar dance band. I know my rig and this band very well. It therefore was shocking when 30 seconds into sound check I realized that my PA could sound so much more impressive. It was like night and day; the clarity and dynamics of my system were noticeably improved. Herein lies the most impressive feature of the Spectra-T: It sounds awesome, and I don't use that word lightly. Rarely has a review product made such an immediate, powerful impression on me.

We used the APB a couple weeks later as a monitor desk for the band the Klezmatics, a veteran NY band doing music in the folk/Klezmer genre. The Spectra-T performed wonderfully tackling six wedge mixes and an IEM mix, leaving smiles plastered on the face

of the engineer and the band.

My only beef with the test unit was that it had unbalanced inserts; the now available Spectra-Ti and Ci, however, feature separate, balanced send and return jacks on all insert points. I was also a bit baffled about how to get the talkback mic input to route properly. I actually had to look at the manual!

### | SUMMARY

There are many features I enjoyed using on the Spectra-T: the variable EQ width, the mirrored XLR outputs, the flexibility to shift from FOH to monitors and the powerful matrix are all wonderful. They are all trumped, however, by the fact that this board — I'll say it again — sounds awesome. The signal path has been impeccably crafted, so much so that it could possibly make you forget about things like recall and onboard dynamics. If this board proves to be reliable and the APB name becomes rider friendly, then you should be seeing the Spectra for a long time to come.

*Andrew Roberts, a regular contributor to Pro Audio Review, is a sound reinforcement and recording engineer.*

# THE PERFECT MIX

## hear back.

- Unlimited system size
- Local control of eight channels (stereo mix and six "more-me's")
- ADAT, analog, HearBus inputs are switch-selectable from front panel
- Built-in DSP Limiter with threshold adjustment



- Master Volume
- Stereo AUX In
- Balanced Line-Outputs
- Built-in Mic Stand Mount
- Standard CAT5e power

## mix back.

- Affordable, flexible 16x12x2 monitor mixer
- 16 Mic/Line inputs each with passive split and two stereo and twelve mono level controls
- Pin 1 lift and Mic power switches per channel
- Dual switch-selectable effects sends
- Stereo Aux inputs
- Channel Inserts
- Four-band EQ with dual sweepable mids
- Talkback with intercom and optional remote
- 16 master outputs each available as analog, ADAT, and HearBus



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