

PreSonus ADL 700 Channel Strip

Centered on Anthony DeMaria's lauded ADL 600 discrete Class A tube preamplifier, the ADL 700 is a reasonably affordable option in the premium (and premium priced) channel strip marketplace.

What do you get when combining a premium tube preamp, FET compressor and EQ with a boutique design philosophy, but mass production sensibilities?

I first noticed Anthony DeMaria Labs S/C/L 1500 stereo opto compressor/limiter when freelancing; I fell in love with its boutique design, tube-based gentility and delightful mix-gluing ability. Now with the long-awaited release of the DeMaria co-designed ADL 700 channel strip, my obvious first question is, "Boutique or budget?"

Features: Microphone Preamp

The ADL 700 utilizes the same DeMaria-designed, "three triode-based, Class-A, discrete" tube mic amp found in PreSonus' ADL 600 (employing a 12AT7 and two 6922 tubes), with high-voltage rails (+/-300V). This high gain preamp (65 dB, 75 dB with Master gain) has stepped gain control (in five dB steps) along with a continuously variable -30 to +30 dB trim, continuously variable high pass filter (20 to 200 Hz), line level input, quarter-inch DI input, multiple

impedance settings (150, 300, 900 and 1500) and a -20 dB pad.

I found the preamp section to be the best part of the ADL 700: incredibly musical, clear and versatile. Driven hard, this preamp will lightly break up and distort mildly at first, but jump right into over saturated valve glory when slammed. Clean and beautiful, though, is this preamp's forte, especially with the flexible impedance settings. Depending on the mic, 150 Ohms offers the fullest bottom and smoothest top, while I used the balanced sounding 300 and 900 Ohms settings most. 1500 Ohms often sounded a little too strident, with its crisp top end and lean forwardness.

Both the stepped pots for coarse gain and impedance feel too flimsy and loose, but the fine gain control about makes up for it. The latter has enough firmness and ade-

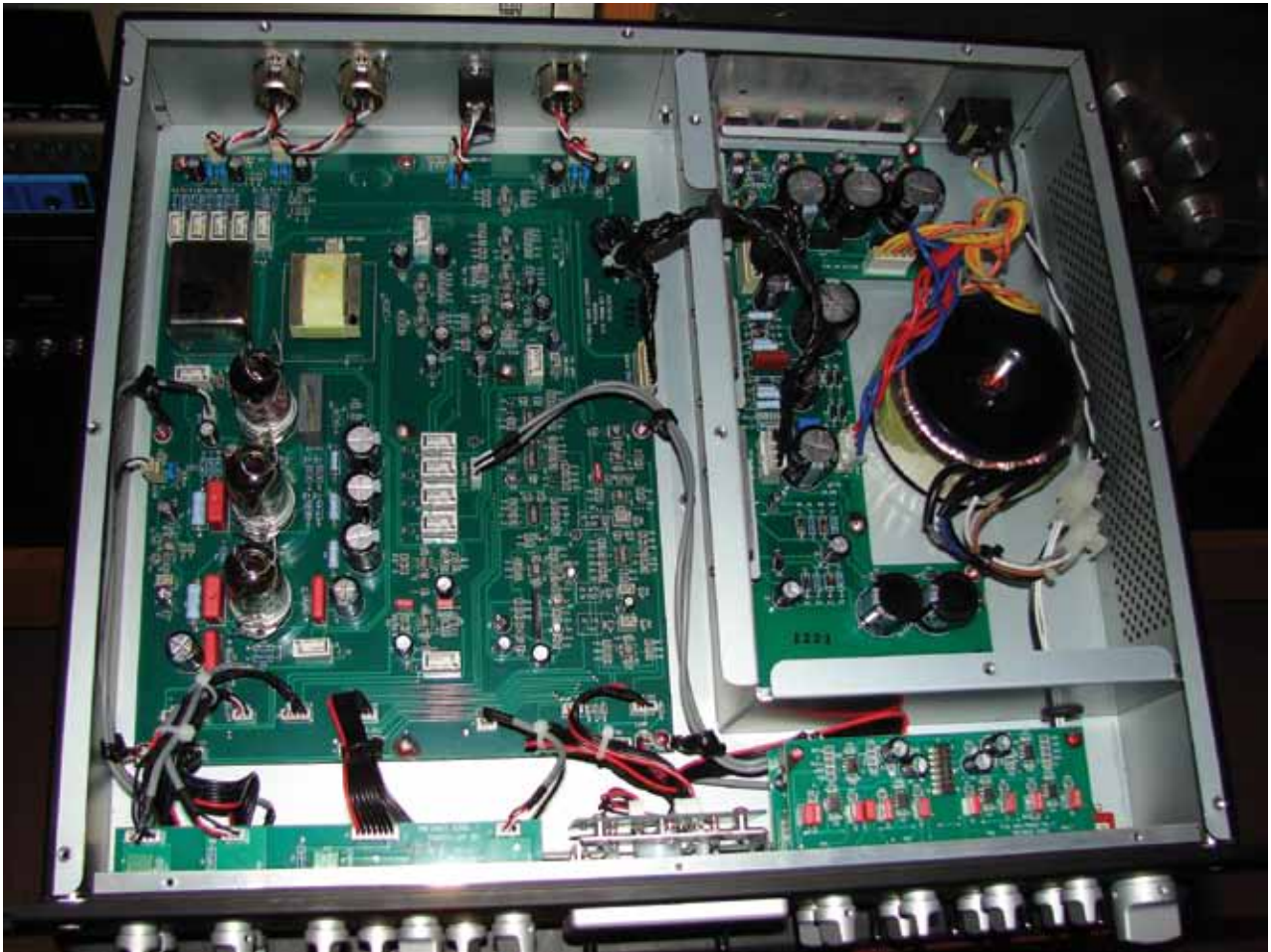
quate sensitivity to allow gain riding during dynamic takes (i.e., vocals); I used it a lot. The high pass filter is especially helpful with its sweepability, particularly since the compressor doesn't have a sidechain filter. Though the ADL 700's pots are a little small and jumpy, I absolutely love the heavy duty switches used throughout [For this review, PreSonus sent Rob an "engineering prototype." As such, some key cosmetic changes to the final ADL 700 were underway at the time of this review. The stepped, coarse gain pots are among the items changed; "they have been tightened up so they feel like the knobs on the ADL 600," offers the company. - Ed.]

Features: Compressor

After the DeMaria preamp, PreSonus Master Designer Robert Creel (designer of the PreSonus XMAX mic pre) takes over, starting with a FET-based compressor. It offers an abundance of low ratios, starting with 1:1, reaching 2:1 at half-pot travel and maxing out at a conservative 4:1. Continuously variable attack and release



The PreSonus ADL 700.



A look inside the ADL 700: tubes and ICs among various other components abound.

times are offered, along with make-up gain and the comp can be placed before or after EQ.

After warming up to the compressor—I first found it a little “barky”—I discovered it has both ample controls and options. I also soon realized that low ratios are where this section is most comfortable; even at 2:1, I had to watch my attack times and threshold very carefully. Yet at lower ratios (such as 1.25:1, my favorite on the ADL 700), users can lower the threshold significantly, tweak attack and release to musical taste (with more flexibility) and get an invisible, balanced, and full sound that really complements the musical mic pre.

Features: Equalizer

The IC-based EQ section (bypassable) has four frequency bands: the low band has either a bell or shelf curve, same as

the high band, and the two mid bands are gently sloped, low Q (0.55) bell curves. Frequency selection is continuously variable, with slightly overlapping bandwidths and ± 16 dB of gain.

Due to its limited flexibility and a slightly hard sound, the EQ was my least favorite section of the ADL 700. The wide, forgiving Q is helpful at gentle shaping, but for notching out troubled frequencies, tighter Qs would be far more useful. I didn’t use the EQ for boosting, but for pulling out frequencies I did appreciate that the EQ can be placed before the compressor, allowing for a smoother tonal balance and kinder compression reaction.

In Use

The ADL 700’s master output offers a wide gain range: -80 to +10 dB. There are transformers at both input and output, with

a Cinemag before the preamp. I/O is via XLR (mic or line), with a quarter-inch DI on the front panel. The single VU meter monitors either output level or gain reduction, with a -6 dB setting that helps prevent “needle pepping” when viewing a hot output.

The DI should definitely be considered in any ADL 700 evaluation, as it sounds fantastic. I received excellent results with a passive bass: noticeably sweet top end definition coupled with a solid, extended bottom end.

Electric basses, percussion, and electric or acoustic guitars all sound very nice via ADL 700, slightly forward and present (hear Review Audioclip 1: soundcloud.com/pro-audio-review-magazine). As a matter of fact, the ADL 700 pleased most every client who had the opportunity to use it in session here at Catalyst; in particular, vocalists seemed to love it, citing clarity, presence and even

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preference over my usual premium signal chain—generally Chandler Limited, Manley Labs and Neve components. I valued the 700's gradual tube break-up and impedance versatility. However, one regular client in particular didn't like the ADL 700's sound: an opinionated classical pianist who has a discriminating ear. His criticism was mainly frequency-based: the EQ was too high-mids focused, and overall, the unit translates too much bark from the source, with not enough clarity for his taste.

Summary

Overall, the ADL 700 is a fine sounding unit that excels with versatility and flexibility. It is crowned by a stellar mic amp, bolstered by a powerful (if limited) compressor, and slightly hampered

by a semi-parametric EQ (I'd prefer fully parametric). Offering performance well beyond budget-priced gear, the ADL 700 is poised to populate “pro project” studios and one input commercial rooms (for musicians, vocalists, VO artists, broadcasters, etc.), ones that require stellar performance, but are willing to sacrifice a few options to possibly save thousands of dollars.

For me, these conclusions raise the question of the ADL 700's proper market placement. You may remember my “*PAR Session Trial: World-Class Channel Strips*” evaluation (<http://www.prosoundnetwork.com/PARSessionTrial-ChannelStrips>) in which I compared premium models from several manufacturers. Conversely, I have a T.L. Audio channel strip on hand (featuring

three tubes, a VCA-based compressor, four-band EQ, lots of ICs, listing only about \$1K); I tested it alongside the ADL 700. The ADL 700 ran circles around the T.L. Audio's performance, with wider frequency response, less noise and overall better accuracy. The ADL 700 did not entirely keep up with the *PAR Session Trial* units. Its mic pre is clearly in that esteemed league, while the rest of the unit does not reach similar build or component standards.

At \$1,999 street, the ADL 700 is at the entry point into world-class channel strips, as it features performance that approaches the best of the best, though at half to two-thirds the cost of the competition.

Price: \$1,999 street

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