

Amazona.de – Review Crème Buss Compressor and Mastering Equalizer

English translation of <https://www.amazona.de/test-tegeler-audio-manufaktur-creme/>

Beef up the master

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It's time to come back to a basic discussion. One minute you're singing Christmas carols with close family and immediately once the festivities are over, it is back to the fronts of the eternal battle between analogue and digital. What happened? German company Tegeler Audio Manufaktur, based in Berlin, has now released the Crème – an analogue product in the form of a stereo equaliser, in Pultec style with a bus compressor. Naturally, one or two people will be asking what exactly is so special about that. A look at the manual reveals the ways it can be used.

Michael Krusch's team explicitly tells people to use this product when mixing to forcibly transform the digital signal and feed the result back to the DAW. Seriously? We already have so many compressor and filter plug-ins, why the elaborate routing of the signal for the mixdown or at least one subgroup? And that takes us back to the trenches!



Design

The Tegeler Audio Manufaktur Crème is a standard 2 U rack-mount that can also be used as a desktop device thanks to its four small rubber feet. As for connections, you'll find stereo XLR input and output jacks at the back of the device. At the front, next to the power switch and a yellow LED status light, there are nine large graduated knobs, three mini switches, and a simple VU meter to display the reduction of the output level as a result of the compressor in dB.



Six different frequency ranges can be boosted at five different levels as shelving filters both in the bass (20 Hz, 30 Hz, 60 Hz, 100 Hz, 140 Hz, 200 Hz) and high (10 kHz, 12 kHz, 16 kHz, 18 kHz, 20 kHz, 24 kHz) ranges. The built-in compressor has the standard threshold, ratio, attack and release adjustments, and the mini switch can be used to separate frequencies below 60 Hz or 120 Hz as desired.

This is a useful function for keeping the performance-eating bass out of the compression process. The ability to adjust the signal path in terms of the order of the components it passes through is also very nice. Thus, a mini switch can be used to decide whether the incoming signal should first pass through the equaliser and then the compressor, or whether this should be done in reverse order. As expected, the sound varies massively depending on the present used.



Putting the Crème to the test

In other respects, the Crème deliberately stays away everything that is popular and expensive in digital devices – there are no strips of LEDs, displays, and storage space; instead the device prefers to limit itself to delicately managing signals in the background. Using a finely graduated output control, it finally sends the processed signal on to the next stage of processing. The Crème is delivered in the legendary 'wine box', by the way, which is refreshingly different to the usual cardboard packaging.

In practice

Okay, let us look a little closer at the philosophy behind the Crème. In order to properly understand the approach, we need to take things back a few years, or more accurately speaking, back to the roots of the mixdown. In the mid-1980s the Americans once again were at the forefront when it came to producing a fat mix. There is no record of which sound engineer or producer was the first to have the idea to subject a finished mix to a separate round of stereo signal processing. The only apparent fact is that American studios at this time were edging much closer to 0 dB on the then-new CDs than their European counterparts. More bass, more punch, more noise. The mastering process was born and rapidly developed to become a processing stage considered almost equally important to the signal recording itself.



Side view

In order to better imagine the subsequent shaping through the mastering, some mixdown engineers would slap a master equaliser or perhaps even a compressor into the signal path to optimise their mix for mastering. It would then be relatively fast to balance the mix using an A/B comparison, or, if needed, create two mixes – one with master processing, and one without, before it goes to the mastering studio.

The camp splits here, too. Many producers skip the classic mastering step these days and run various dynamic, filter, and limiter plug-ins in the master channel throughout every processing stage. But this only works with a perfect mix created by a professional with sufficient experience, which works well not just on a very high-end studio system, but also any other speakers from the kitchen radio right up to a home entertainment system. On top of this, every plug-in allows ample latency and reduces the tightness at the recording stage. If the signal is fed back to the analogue level and remains there right up until listening, then these problems are neatly avoided. In addition, analogue devices tend to have a flattering effect on the signal, making it sound softer and warmer than a plug-in, which will usually snatch all the computing power it can get and still not obtain quite the same effect.



The Berlin wine box

Of course, it is possible to use the Tegeler Audio Manufaktur Crème as a normal stereo processor in the recording stage, but the frequency selection of the shelving filters may not offer the desired effect, depending on the character. However, some of the advertised frequencies may prompt a few frowns. 20 or 30 Hz are often listed in speaker manuals, but these usually turn out to be power-hungry, atmospheric vibrations that are more likely to detract from the listener's pleasure. Similarly, in the high range, the 20 kHz controller can be used to add a certain accent to the sound, although I might still dare to question whether a 24 kHz filter would benefit the primary users of the product.



Using the Crème is very intuitive – with appropriate experience, it is essentially impossible to go wrong. Similar to equalisation effects on classic stereos, the low and high controls provide a melodious loudness effect that is still preferred by many music listeners. The compressor is also comparatively simple to use, especially as it is much more discreet than a standalone product. It is difficult to make serious adjustment errors, for example causing massive pumps, which creates a relaxed working atmosphere.

However, anyone hoping for a significant “aha” effect upon using the product will unfortunately be disappointed. The Crème is much subtler, working discreetly in the background, without obnoxiously taking centre stage. Only when switching to bypass mode can one see how much one has already become accustomed to the compressed signal and how comparatively unimpressive the original signal sounds in direct comparison.



The Crème VU meter

Summary

Once again, Berlin-based Tegeler Audio Manufaktur has created a very good analogue product for the digital signal path. The stereo equaliser with bus compressor in Pultec style impresses us with its high-end components, ease of use, and subtle hint of decadence. Even if the product was primarily designed for master processing, the Crème can still be used as a traditional stereo filter when recording.

The analogue sound signal resolution is without a doubt one of the product’s greatest strengths, and leaves the competition with a lot to catch up on. Whether this is worth almost 1,700 euros, however, is something that each individual must decide for themselves.

Pro

- Sound
- Workmanship
- Components
- Design

Price

- RRP: 1,699.00 EUR