

TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

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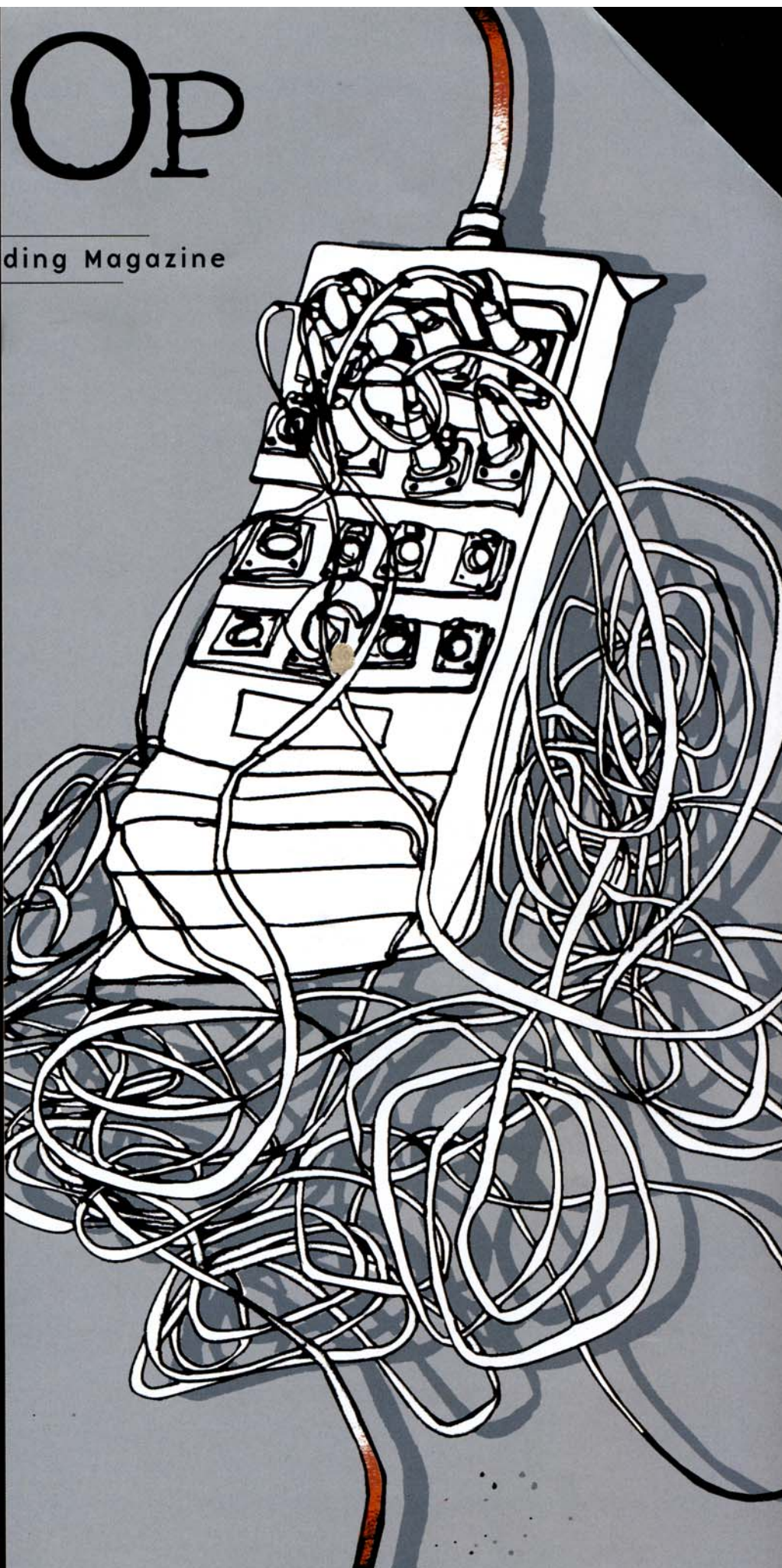
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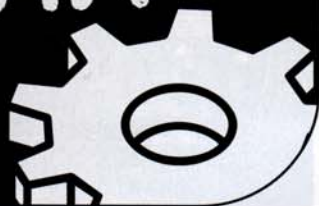
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Radial Engineering

Q3 500-series induction coil EQ

First looks can be deceiving, and the Radial Q3 is anything but what I initially imagined it to be. My first impression upon seeing the 500-series module was of an Audiotronics-style 3-band inductive coil EQ, similar to the Purple ODD (*Tape Op* #77). The physical layout is similar: four knobs, three 2-way switches, a simple high-pass filter, and bypass. Perhaps the most well-known inductive coil EQ design is the Pultec EQP-1A, which is revered for its ability to greatly manipulate a sound without the graininess or excessive phase shifts that can plague other EQ topologies when taken to their extremes. With a Pultec, you can boost the top end forever and never feel like the EQ itself is causing any harshness, and this carries over to other coil-based equalizers such as the Purple and Audiotronics. While the Q3 shares this aspect of its design with the others, that and the faceplate are just about all that they have in common.

The Radial Q3 is essentially a box filled with preset EQs. Instead of selecting a frequency and how much to boost or cut, each of the three 12-position Grayhill rotary switches offers up 11 different EQ curves as well as a flat bypass, and many of the curves would need two or three bands of a traditional equalizer to emulate. The Bass and High rotaries are boost only, and the Mid is a cut. Additionally, each band has a 2-way switch labeled "Shift", which when activated increases the amount of boost or cut. This makes it easy to hear the curves as you flip through them, and then afterwards tone down the selected curve by taking it out of Shift mode. If you do the math, this combination of controls offers a total of 12,167 presets of tonal variation. Check out the website or download the manual to see detailed graphs of every curve possible from each of the three bands. The Q3 also adds an overall gain control, which is helpful when compensating for the overall change in sound level when you employ the various curves, especially when A/B'ing with the EQ in/out. The gain control, by the way, is ahead of the filter circuits, so it's possible to hit the Q3 with lots of signal, then turn up additional gain to saturate the coils.

When a pair of Q3 modules came in, I threw them directly into one of my 500-series racks and started tracking a 4-song EP with Chuck Stern's new project, Stern. They're a rock band with a heavy prog influence, and I patched a Q3 in on the guitar to see what it could do. The guitarist was playing a Telecaster through a custom, KT88 tube-based amp of mine, and it was mic'ed with a Neumann U 67 through a Neve 1070. The sound was very clean, very dynamic, and very, very loud; and the U 67, while a fantastic mic, can be very mid-present and only seems to get more so as it's pushed harder. I put the Q3's high band in Shift mode and flipped through the available options while listening to him play. It took me about 10 seconds to land on something that worked perfectly. I tried flipping it out of Shift, decided I wanted the additional boost, and put it back in. With very little tweaking, I had the guitar sitting exactly where I wanted against the lush, Badalamenti-esque keyboard pads.

We employed the Q3 on a number of overdubs with success, but one place it really stepped out was recording our cordless drill. During one of the noisier, freer sections on the record, there was a part begging for some hysterical sounds. Daniel Schlett grabbed our drill and ran into the live room. Since the idea was so outlandish and spur of the moment, we didn't want to waste much time fiddling with effects, so the Q3 was quickly employed. Again it only took about 10 seconds, this time flipping through the bass-boost and mid-cut settings,

to find an EQ curve that really complemented the sound and helped it find its place in a wild, unpredictable mix.

Later, while working with the band Kleenex Girl Wonder, I got an opportunity to try out a stereo pair of Q3s on the mix bus. A preset EQ is a little quirkier for that job, where you're trying to make really specific, delicate changes to the whole mix. While I found the lack of parametric controls a little disconcerting at first, the Q3 ended up doing the job that I usually reserve for our Gyraf Gyratec XIV parallel-passive mastering EQ nicely. Slight boosts in the top and bottom were as smooth as any inductive-coil design I've ever used and made quick work out of pre-mastering the track for the band's listeners. I wouldn't hesitate to leave them on the mix bus for future sessions (although I personally consider them to be more of a tracking-style EQ).

The real defining factor of any preset-based piece of gear is the usefulness of the presets. Radial must have spent a lot of time researching and testing before finalizing the preset curves in the Q3. It's a useful, refreshing, and simple tool in a world with almost too many options. Obviously it's not right for every job — and it's certainly not a replacement for a fully-parametric EQ or a surgical plug-in — but it makes the jobs it is right for easy, and more importantly, fun. Fun has no worse enemy in the studio than fussing with too many details. Keep things moving, keep the musicians involved and interested, and you'll get the best performances out of them. It's nice to see a manufacturer coming at things from that angle, and building tools for studios to really get down to work with. Moreover, by going with a preset design, Radial is able to offer the Q3 at a price that is far lower than you would expect for an all-discrete, true inductive-coil design. (\$599 street; www.radialeng.com)

—Marc Alan Goodman, www.strangeweatherbrooklyn.com