

Lindell Audio LiN2A

Valve Optical Compressor



Does Lindell's LiN2A sound as classy as the famous compressor that inspired it?

MATT HOUGHTON

I shouldn't need to state that Lindell Audio's LiN2A is based on the Teletronix LA-2A! A valve-amplified optical compressor, the LA-2A is a characterful and forgiving processor with a reputation for assertive level control that won't ruin the dynamics of a performance. Its character is due in part to the nature of the optical compression and in part to the sound of its valve stages. Several replicas are available, but the LiN2A, is priced competitively and it's pretty well specified too, with Cinemag input and output transformers, a Black Lion Audio T4BLA opto cell and, generally, 'name' components used throughout. As supplied, some of the valves vary from the models used in its muse, but internal jumper switches allow those who crave authenticity to install the original types.

Quick Tour

All the LiN2A's electronics sit inside a nice, solid 2U chassis and, as with most valve devices, it can generate quite a bit of heat: you'll want to leave space in a rack for this to dissipate through the top-panel ventilation slots. A tasteful two-tone front panel is largely dark blue-grey, punctuated by pale blue-grey legends, but that scheme is inverted in a middle stripe that hosts the company's logo and a generous, warm-glowing moving-coil meter.

This panel sports most of the expected controls, recreating the familiar LA-2A 'back

to front' arrangement with a Peak Reduction knob (in effect, threshold, though it also affects the ratio a bit) on the right and a Gain (output level) knob on the left. Both are detented pots. Top-right is a rotary switch which sets the meter to indicate output level (referenced to either -10dBV or +4dBu) or gain reduction. On the left, a chunky toggle switch selects Limit or Compress mode. As on other such devices, these nominally give you an infinity:1 or 3:1 ratio, but the ratio, attack and release times all vary with the level and dynamics of the source.

I was surprised to see no Emphasis control. I've found this useful in refining an LA-2A's response to sounds with lots of high-mid and high frequencies such as esses and cymbals. Also, I'd half expected to find some other commonly added facilities, such as a wet/dry mix control, but there are no such embellishments.

On the rear, the main I/O (on balanced TRS sockets) are accompanied by a meter calibration pot, a grounding point and an IEC14 mains power inlet with 115/230V slide switch. Lindell deserve brownie points both for choosing an internal PSU, based around a toroidal transformer, and for the inclusion of a front-panel toggle to switch the unit on and off — when the LiN2A's not in use you can power up your rack without having it heat the room!

Smoothly Does It

To test the LiN2A I tried both recording through it and inserting it in a DAW project or two, where I ran different sources through it. It's a positive sign that I have very little to say about the LiN2A! It delivered precisely the classy yet characterful compression I'd expect of an LA-2A. It's a wonderfully

forgiving sound, and you really do have to work pretty hard to make it sound bad. This, along with the simplicity of operation, makes tracking through it a joy. As I'd expected, it was particularly effective on vocals, whether male or female, and in pretty much whatever register or genre I threw at it. But I also enjoyed it on both bass and acoustic guitars, and in that latter role the large meter came in very handy, helping me tame overexuberant strums judiciously. On rock drums I loved using it in the Limit setting as a sort of parallel 'crush' processor. (I tend to do parallel compression on separate mixer channels, though some might pine for a wet/dry blend control for that.)

Comparing the LiN2A with the equivalent UAD plug-in, the sound was very close indeed, though the hardware sounded that bit smoother when used at more extreme settings, for example for that drum crush role. As is so often the case, I also found it much quicker and easier to dial in a desirable sound using the hardware, though that may be a personal preference thing. I missed the emphasis control only rarely, so I don't think that's a big loss.

On the whole, then, this is a lovely, classy implementation of a studio classic. If you're in the market for a versatile compressor for your main recording chain, or want to get more hands-on when mixing, the LiN2A deserves consideration. **///**

summary

A well built, classy-sounding clone of the LA-2A, all this lacks is the Emphasis control.

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