Sony

MDR-MV1 headphones

A few months ago, I was hired to work on the audio engineering team at a production camp put on by Sony. One of the events at this camp was a demo of Sony's immersive audio tools, and this was my first experience with their *MDR-MV1* headphones. Sony's immersive audio team has been pushing hard to develop tools for producing and mixing in immersive audio formats. This definitely isn't a review about immersive audio, however, if you've dabbled with 360 Reality Audio or Atmos you know the challenges of getting these formats to translate into stereo headphones. In search of a solution, the team at Sony set out to design a perfect pair of headphones for monitoring spatial audio. Let me be extra clear: The *MDR-MV1s* are just stereo headphones. All the specs that help these headphones translate audio in 3D also allow them to reproduce the same stereo format that's been around for over half a century. To help our ears hear spatial audio, our monitoring needs to be remarkably transparent, and these open-back headphones have noticeably minimal acoustic resonance. They're incredibly detailed and rated by the manufacturer as flat from 5 Hz to 80 kHz. Bonus comfort features include a detachable cable and an incredibly lightweight headset (approximately half of a pound). Seriously, these are the lightest headphones I've ever trusted for professional work. If you think this all sounds nice, even just for normal stereo work, you're absolutely right! While trying to build best-in-class headphones for immersive audio, Sony just happened to make my new favorite stereo headphones. These have been my daily drivers since I first tried them on.

I'm learning to be comfortable mixing in headphones. Out of caution, I first began using headphones while working in unfamiliar studios. I'd pack a pair of trusted headphones (that I reference often) to prevent any surprises when returning home to familiar monitors. More recently, I've begun taking extended trips away from home with the confidence that I can deliver mixes to my clients (while wearing headphones) anywhere I can power up my computer. As I've grown used to long hours in headphones, I've formed strong opinions about what I need if I'm going to keep these on my ears all day. The first time I put on the *MDR-MV1s*, they kind of blew my mind. The light weight and neutral sound can almost fool you into thinking you're not wearing them! I'm pretty cautious about changing my monitoring, and I only trust what I'm familiar with! Yet somehow, I immediately recognized that these *MDR-MV1s* were just voiced so naturally, and they really are extremely comfortable to wear. It's been nearly three months, and they're still my primary headphones for working both at home and abroad. I couldn't be happier. *($499 MAP; pro.sony/ue_US/products/headphones/mdr-mv1)*

-Scott McDowell <fadersolo.com>

Heritage Audio

Grandchild 670-500 compressor

There's an age-old philosophical question in the audio community: "If a Fairchild compressor/limiter falls in the woods and loses over two dozen tubes and transformers, is it still a Fairchild?" Where does innovation end and compromise begin, and is it even worth attempting to pull off something this ambitious? The elephant in the room, though, is that most of us have never worked with a *real* Fairchild, something I've been able to do only a handful of times – but that's not even near enough experience to speak with any authority on this subject. Keeping this in mind, my approach to Heritage Audio's two space 500 Series *Grandchild 670* vari-mu stereo compressor was simple: Does it sound good and do what I want a vintage-style variable-mu to do?

My first test was listening to the "box tone" of the *Grandchild* without any compression. If you're looking for the *Grandchild* to do something along the lines of the Manley Variable Mu (where your source sounds noticeably different by just passing signal), you should probably keep looking. The *Grandchild* seems pretty transparent, even when driving the input quite hard. That's not a good or bad thing; it just depends on what you're wanting out of your compressor. After a few weeks, I was hearing an extremely subtle high end roll-off when using the *Grandchild* on brighter sources or the mix bus. It's sweet and warm, but not something I would say is a feature of the unit. As far as frequency response and harmonics, it's fairly clean by design.

The Time Constant options also differ slightly from the original Fairchilds, which is definitely a step in the right direction, in my opinion. The first setting is what Heritage is calling the "Ardent Mod," named after Ardent Studios [*Tape Op* #58], where everyone from Led Zeppelin to The White Stripes has recorded – quite the history! There's a lot of lore behind Ardent's modifications to their in-house Fairchilds, but in essence, they had some of the Time Constant settings modified to be quicker and more useful. I've never really used the higher/longer Time Constant settings on any Fairchild design, so an option like this is a welcomed rarity.

Time Constant 1 on the *Grandchild* is an instant and familiar sound when used on acoustic guitars; it just sounds right, and apparently, it was what Jimmy Page always requested on his acoustic guitars. If there's one single takeaway from this unit, I think Heritage nailed that part. From there, Time Constant 2 becomes the original Fairchild's first setting, with the rest following suit.

Let's talk about what I believe is the essence of the "Fairchild Experience." There's a lot going on under the hood, but you have very little control over many parameters. You pick a couple of settings and use your ears. I find myself realizing after the fact that I'm being a lot more aggressive with the *Grandchild* than I would with other compressors that let you fine-tune many parts of the compression process. You also realize after a while that a seemingly simple design has the potential to be extremely flexible when you get better at understanding all the intricate interactions. This leads to my biggest complaint: Like the original Fairchilds, the *Grandchild* does not offer an output control, which can require post compression make up gain during tracking, or when pushing the Input hard. The DC Threshold essentially varies the ratio and compression curve (knee). When turned fully clockwise to the right, you begin in compression territory, then gradually move to more of a limiter ratio as you turn counterclockwise to the left. When setting your input gain to match your original signal, you'll have no problem getting more than enough compression with the DC Threshold set between around 1:00 and up to the default 5:00 setting. If you want to get into heavier limiting territory (such as crushing drum room mics), you must drive your input gain so hard at times that you'll be clipping your converters. In my case, I've got the *Grandchild* in the 500 Series slots of my API Box console [*Tape Op* #101], so I've got faders to compensate on the output side of things. However, to get the most from your *Grandchild*, I would suggest you budget for some sort of attenuation device to manage the compressor's output. (*On the other hand, the* Grandchild *is one of the few 500 Series units we've seen with a power switch on the front, allowing one to turn it off when not in use to save tube life and reduce heat output. -Ed.*)

I also found it frustrating that the three position high-pass sidechain filter is on the side of the unit, which means you have to take the Grandchild out of the 500 Series chassis to change it. There were times when the filters worked perfectly for something like mix bus duties, and other times when they made the *Grandchild* react differently at the detection circuit. A simple flip of the switch solves that, but the positioning could be more convenient. For most instances, I kept the sidechain off, except for mix bus duties alongside the API 527 compressor built into my console.

Compromise isn't always a bad word – it makes options like the *Grandchild* a reality. I can't be the one to tell you whether or not some of those compromises are going to be things you can work around for your situation. What I can tell you is that there are not many options in this format or price point, and the fact Heritage was able to pull this off at all is impressive in and of itself. There were a few moments of frustration where I couldn't quite get the *Grandchild* to do what was needed, but many other instances where it put a smile on my face and sounded flat-out awesome. Though this unit is not a Fairchild in every way, it often gets close to the real thing. I also can't afford to spend as much on one compressor as I did on my whole recording console, which makes most of those compromises easier to swallow! *($1999 MAP; heritageaudio.com) -Matt Anderson <millsounds.com>*

IsoAcoustics

V120 monitor ceiling/wall mounts

In what might possibly be the sexiest review ever published in *Tape Op,* let's talk about monitor mounts! I was recently in need of upgrading my Atmos monitoring, and I required a better solution for the four height speakers mounted on the ceiling of my studio (I mix Atmos in a 7.1.4 configuration). My previous solution was a crazy bespoke mount that included a König & Meyer bracket with some custom-cut neoprene and wood panels to place my former monitors in a usable, purely utilitarian way. Now, I knew I wanted a more solid, flexible, and isolated mounting method (up to 40 lbs.) for my new Genelec 8330A SAM monitors in the height position.

Since my friend, Aaron Murray, a former designer with Dusty Strings (now Boeing engineer) had put together my previous ceiling mounts, part of that design included perfectly cut wedges for my vaulted ceiling to provide flat surfaces parallel to the floor. I was able to reuse these custom blocks, which were *exactly* the right size for the new IsoAcoustics *V120* mounts to be used on the Genelecs.

I've been well acquainted with IsoAcoustics ISO speaker stands and their ISO-Pucks [*Tape Op* #125] for years, so when they developed new isolation mounts for ceiling and wall mounting, I knew that was the right way to go for me. The *V120* is the foundation of their new mounting ecosphere, and