



Phoenix Audio Nicerizer 16

Regardless of your beliefs about the relative merits of ITB and OTB mixing, the fact remains that enough manufacturers believe there is a market for the summing box.

GEORGE SHILLING listens up and nods sagely...nice.

THE NICERIZER SERIES comprises two distinctly different models and the 8 has a slightly different concept from the 16 which we have here. Both are summing devices for out-of-the-box DAW mixing. The 8 features eight channels with individual level controls, and individual inputs and outputs, with two separate mono buses. The 16 gains a further eight channels, but loses the individual outputs, and the knobs on the front panel for each channel are pan pots, feeding a stereo bus.

It should be pointed out that this model is not brand new — it even predates the Neve 8816 — but some improvements have been made since its initial launch, with extra monitoring features and redesigned internals for easier servicing. Phoenix was originally known mainly for retrofitting Neve consoles, but although its panel designs encourage comparison, its circuitry design is considerably evolved from the 1970s ethos.

The all-discrete Nicerizer 16 (UK£1945 +VAT) is contained within a 2U case with metallic finish vintage Neve-style knobs and a fairly straightforward layout. The pan pot arrangement mirrors the XLR input sockets on the rear. It would seem probable that most users will arrange the channels as multiple stereo stems, panning alternately hard left and right. The pan pots are loosely damped and lack a centre déteinte or bypass, so there is a slight concern that the knobs might become inadvertently knocked off their intended positions. Each channel also features a +8dB pushbutton to drive the Class A circuitry a little harder; again there is a slight possibility of error as there are no indicators for these, and their travel is relatively shallow.

On the output section, along with a master level fader knob is a stereo width control. This can be bypassed with a toggle but when in-circuit allows continuous variation from Mono via normal Stereo to

+25% wider. This is fun, and a touch of extra width can certainly add some life to flat sounding mixes with no perceived unpleasantness with such things as phase. Even in the stereo position, some enhancement is perceived due to the extra Class A stage.

The rear panel features main outputs on a pair of XLRs, these are always fed the main programme and are suitable for sending to a 2-track recorder or back into the DAW for printing the mix. Additionally, there are jack sockets for Aux Output, 2-Track Input, and Insert. The Aux outputs take the same feed as the main outs, but with a separate dedicated mini level control on the front panel. The front panel Monitor section is flexible, providing a path with a headphone output with selectable sources from each pair of inputs, LR out (post main output level knob), Prefade signal, 2-track input, and aux. A simple toggle allows switching from normal stereo monitoring into mono, selecting either Left or Right signal to feed both sides.

The monitor output, while set up as a headphone connection, will happily drive an external monitoring setup or a talkback system with the correct adapter leads. The bonus of 2-track monitoring is welcome but there seemed to be a slight LR wiring fault on the review model, as although the channel pairs monitored correctly in stereo, the meters were reversed L-R, and when toggled to mono L-R was round the wrong way on the monitor output. The manufacturer has put this down to a one-off wiring mistake.

Making scientifically valid comparisons is particularly difficult when the differences are subtle, but I bravely set up a few scenarios to compare in-the-box mixes with Nicerized ones. Simply running audio through the unit in stereo changes the tone subtly, generally bringing a slightly more musical richness to the programme. However, splitting a mix into three stereo buses of Drums/Bass, Vocals, and

everything else, there was a noticeable difference from the in-the-box version. Oddly, the Nicerized version seemed more rhythmic and punchy, taming some low-mid mush and bringing clarity to transients. However, this was an unscientific test so on another day, with another track results may vary significantly. Pushing the +8dB buttons in (and matching levels again) seems to exaggerate the differences ever so slightly, but also the output level is a factor (not to mention how hard you drive your monitoring inputs!) The Nicerizer has enormous headroom, the monitor meters go up to +16 but it will happily go to +26, and the tone of the unit suggests plenty of power in reserve.

Perhaps some cost saving could be made by dispensing with some or all of the pan pots. In normal use, most signals will need to be either stereo or mono in the exact middle. Four stereo bus inputs, four mono centred, and four panning inputs would surely suffice most of the time. However, the present arrangement is simple and easy to use, with little possibility for confusion.

Using external preamps, the Nicerizer also makes a useful combiner for multiple mic setups in a recording situation. In this instance, the 8 model might be a better solution, with its separate level adjustments, but nonetheless the 16 performs this well, adding some desirable subtle colouration.

The subject of ITB or OTB mixing is something of a can of worms, but there can be little doubt that the Nicerizer 16 imparts a desirable sonic character upon all that passes through it. Rivals may offer fancier features, but I think you'd struggle to find a better sounding summing box than this. ■

PROS

Sounds terrific; adds life to your mix; Enhanced Stereo Width option surprisingly pleasant; also a useful recording 'mixer' or combiner.

CONS

Monitor section L-R wiring confusion on review model.

EXTRAS

The Nicerizer 8 has 8 channels of Class A, discrete, truly balanced transformerless input and output with individual level control for each channel.



It has 8 balanced TRS inputs, 8 balanced XLR outputs, two mix buses (linkable to each other and other units), two individual mix bus output level controls and LED level metering switchable for each channel.

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