

ROAD TESTS

Sabine Graphi-Q Equalizer

BY GORDON JENNINGS

The Sabine Graphi-Q is a 24-bit digital graphic equalizer available in a number of different formats. Before I start this review, I must say that I'm not going to spend any time going into the digital-vs.-analog debate. More information on the subject can be obtained through a variety of sources, including some of *Gig's* back issues. Suffice to say that digital has lower noise and a more easily manipulated signal path, whereas analog offers the immediacy of interface—just grab and go.

The first time I saw the Sabine Graphi-Q was at Summer NAMM last year, and I was impressed—so impressed, in fact, that it was my



lead piece in my report on the show. The idea of a digital equalizer with an analog interface seemed to me like an idea whose time had come—the best of both worlds, so to speak. In addition, Sabine throws in its FBX feedback exterminator, a compressor and a digital delay. Very impressive, I thought. Then I was sent one to play with: the GRQ-3102 stereo unit.

The first thing I did, of course, was to read the manual. It's pretty well-written, with easy, step-by-step directions for setting up the unit's various features and a very nice technical section that explains the usage of same. It's mostly a graphic equalizer so you can pull it out of the box, plug it in and go like any graphic. The nature of the beast, however—namely, its versatility—begs you to read the literature. For example, you'll never figure out the FBX without learning how it works. Don't be discouraged; the learning curve is a short one.

OK, let's talk layout. The front panel looks much like a standard stereo graphic, with two sets of 31 sliders and your standard high- and low-pass filters. A quick note on those sliders: Usually shorter throw sliders lack the precision control of the longer throw variety, and stiff sliders likewise feel odd. The combination here actually works well since the extra resistance on the short sliders makes for a smooth

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comfortable feel. To the right are the controls for the FBX, the digital delay and the compressor, with LED indicators for the FBX filters, signal level and gain reduction and a numeric LED readout for the delay. The rear panel features both 1/4-inch and XLR connectors for input and outputs, and the ground-lift switches show an attention to detail. This all comes in a two-rack-space package, by the way.

Enough of that—let's use the beast! My first chance to try it out came in a monitor situation, and I patched it in as the main graphic for two mixes, lead vocal and drum mix. The lead vocal choice was obvious, since I wanted to utilize the FBX to get a nice, loud mix free of feedback. The drum mix was less obvious, as I wished to do the same thing for a drum vocal. The Graphi-Q sounded quite good when we did the twist and shout and I was impressed with the clarity and low noise of the piece. It was a festival-type situation, and I did eight bands that evening. As the level slowly increased over the course of the night, I had no feedback problems at either position. I did notice that on a loud stage the FBX could become confused and activate filters when it apparently perceived musical sounds as feedback; however, I checked it out afterwards and the filters are so narrow that the effect on the sound was minimal.

At the next opportunity, I tried it as an insert on input channels. One channel went to a kick drum which needed some help, and the GRQ worked as well as any graphic. The second channel went on an acoustic guitar which had no feedback eliminator. The FBX worked well, but the guitar still sounded awful. That was not the graphic's fault, if you get my drift. I had done this band before, and that guitar just stunk up the place, but at least the 200 Hz wasn't killing me all night.

The next chance I got, I tried it on stereo sidefills, and took advantage of another very cool feature: If you push down all the sliders on the A channel, then the B channel becomes the master for both. I have always thought that this is the way for a true stereo graphic, and in fact some manufacturers offer this for front-of-house applications, but they are locked into that mode. The Sabine gives you the choice of configurations—either two independent or one true-stereo graphic. This was the place where this piece really shined. Those sidefills kicked butt and never fed back. In addition, the FBX filters seemed to be fooled less frequently by spurious signals.

And now to the downside, and all units have them. The LED displays for the FBX filters, as well as the level and gain reduction, all bleed into each other, making it sometimes difficult to tell what is directly lit and what is indirectly lit. A little masking should solve this. A center detent for the Gain knob would be nice, as would a more visible “pointer” on all of the knobs.

I hooked the GRQ up to an open buss to check out the compressor and delay features. The compressor has limited control from the front panel, but will work well as an overall systems saver. It seems to hit a bit hard, but that’s because the knee seems to be set to hard. The delay is just a typical digital delay, clean and quiet. Note that this is not the type of digital delay you use for reverb and echo effects and you will probably not need this feature unless you are doing some sort of time alignment. Come to think of it, this is the perfect piece for EQing delay stacks.

I’ve really only scratched the surface of this piece. The front panel allows a lot of control of functions, but are still somewhat limited. You can change the number of fixed-vs.-dynamic filters (see the manual), FBX filter width (1/10 octave vs 1/5), delay time, and ratio and threshold of the compressor. If you’re fortunate enough to have a laptop (*Windows only, at this time—Ed.*), you can interface with the Sabine and access even more layers of control, on site, from varying the width of both the FBX as well as the regular graphics filters to more control of the compressor and delay. This interface allows additional control of attack, release, and the aforementioned “knee” function as well as determining delay times by feet, meters or milliseconds—not to men-

tion the fact that it has 68 store and recall user presets and software updates online. In fact, by the time this is in print, the next generation of software will be available with even more cool features, including password protection and the ability to control up to eight units from one central computer.

Overall, this is a fine unit, with the clean, low noise response one expects of a digital unit, coupled with the familiarity of a fully analog interface and the versatility of a computer interface and online software updates. If you just need a graphic, this piece will work well. As your needs grow, you may find its flexibility and versatility will allow it to keep pace and grow along with you.



SOUND CHECK

- **Digital 31-band graphic EQ with analog controls**
- **Built-in FBX Feedback Exterminator**
- **Built-in compressor and digital delay**
- **Single- and dual-channel versions available**
- **3102 \$1,299.95; 3101, \$799.95; 3102S \$1,099.95; 3101S, \$699.95**
- **Sabine, 13301 Highway 441, Alachua, FL 32615**
- **Tel: 904-418-2000.**
- **Fax: 904-418-2001.**