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aligned along the bottom of the panel, with a listing of effects algorithms printed above. Just right of centre, the two-line backlit LCD is mounted above a pair of parameter adjustment buttons, whilst to the right again are six more buttons and a large rotary encoder wheel.

The combi-jack connector accepts balanced input signals on either a 3-pole guarter-inch jack or an XLR.

### Socketry

The rear panel is clearly laid out, with all four inputs and outputs accommodated on quarter-inch jack sockets. These are grouped in stereo pairs (A and B) and if a mono input is required, plugging into the left socket of each group routes the signal to both channels. The rear panel connectors are unbalanced, but small slide switches (one for the inputs and another for the outputs) configure the machine for -10dBu or +4dBu operating levels. Strictly speaking, operating at -10dBu instead of -10dBV means that the nominal signal level will be roughly 2dB too low... but I'm sure that's not going to worry anyone.

The left end of the rear panel carries a pair of MIDI sockets providing a dedicated input, but only a switchable Out/Thru socket. There is also a knob to adjust the contrast of the small front panel LCD. There are no external fuses or mains voltage switching facilities on the rear panel at all, and power is supplied through a captive two-core mains lead.

Signal levels down to -50dBu can be accommodated (maximum +10dBu) and the handbook states that this facility is intended for microphones. However, the input impedance is quoted as 10k(omega), which seems pretty high for most balanced microphones, yet rather low for an electric guitar. Having said that, it worked OK in both instances for me in the studio using short leads, although I would be wary of cable microphony with long mic leads and a loss of quality and detail with long guitar leads.

Adjacent to the input socket are a three-position slide switch and a small control knob. The switch determines which signal path the microphone input is routed to: channel 1 only; channels 1 and 2 (the corresponding rear panel inputs are disabled in both cases), or 'rear' which disables the front panel connector in favour of the rear line-level sockets. The knob below the switch provides a 40dB gain range for the microphone input.

The four larger controls determine the input sensitivity of the corresponding rear-panel inputs and, assuming common input and output operating levels, the controls range from silence to +12dB with unity gain at the one o'clock position. Above each control knob a tricolour LED flashes red for signals within 2dB of clipping, orange from -2 to -6dB and green between -6 and -30dB.

The operational controls are all grouped around the LCD panel, which presents selected information on program numbers, names, effect numbers and types, processing structures and parameter values. Clearly, on a two-line display it is impossible to show everything at once, and so the information is presented according to the operation in hand.

The six buttons to the right of the display are labelled Bypass, Save, FX Type, System, Exit and Enter -- all fairly self-explanatory, although several have alternate functions. For example, the Bypass button can be reconfigured to mute the output instead of providing an effects bypass, although I would have liked the option to mute the input as well, since this is more useful with reverb programs (allowing reverb tails to die away naturally). Similarly, the FX Type button not only selects a specific algorithm when customising the processing, but is also used when trying to search for a preset program of a specific type -- something which is very useful with 200 factory presets and up to another 200 user programs.

The System button accesses MIDI and machine setup parameters. MIDI options include building a table of program change numbers against machine memories, setting the channel number (or Omni Mode), and initiating the bulk transfer of system settings and user memories. The Exit button puts the machine back into normal 'play' mode from any other menu whilst Enter, as well as confirming memory save instructions and the like, is also used as a tap-tempo button and trigger for some effects.

#### Judging Effectiveness

The V55 is pre-programmed with a comprehensive collection of generally very usable effects, although finding your way around them can be a bit of a chore, owing to the usual problem of unrepresentative names combined with the sheer wealth of options. However, familiarity helps a lot, and the effect-type

search function is very easy to use. This is operated by pressing the FX Type button twice to enter the search mode, then dialling in the desired effect type number (derived from the algorithm chart on the front panel). The first found program with the desired effect is then presented for audition and, using the two Edit Parameter buttons, alternative programs with the selected algorithm can be recalled and auditioned. When a suitable program is identified, pressing the Enter button loads it and allows its parameters to be edited and the result saved to a user memory.

If you know precisely what you want, creating an effect from scratch is just as easy. Pressing the FX Type button once allows any desired algorithm to be dialled up by its type number. For the nine four-channel algorithms, the user is presented with just the one process, while for the remaining stereo and dual mono options the display shows the algorithms running in each of the two processing engines. These can be chosen independently with a press of the Parameter Edit buttons to access each engine prior to selecting the appropriate algorithm. Dual processes are shown with a slash or arrow separating them, representing parallel or serial connection respectively; again, this can be chosen as desired.

"I was impressed with the depth and warmth of the reverbs, particularly the four-channel versions which, whilst creating very credible surround sound stages, also seemed to work well with only a stereo output."

According to the manual, the machine is supplied with another booklet called the 'Effect Parameter Guide' which details the programmed effects and the functions of the available parameters for each algorithm. I didn't

initially have access to this booklet, but it is a testament to the intuitiveness of the V55 that I did not feel I was missing out. Most algorithms have a manageable handful of parameters and anyone with some experience of multi-effects processors will find it all very familiar. For example, the reverbs have parameters for on/off, reverb time, pre-delay, size, spread, hi damp, direct level, effect level and master level -- all pretty obvious stuff -- and all the other effects are just as instinctive.

In fact the only thing that took me a little while to figure out was how to make the tap-tempo function work (the algorithms which respond to tap-tempo or manual triggering are usefully identified in the front panel table). It turned out that the delay time parameter had to be incremented to the next step after maximum (to read 'tap'), or the trigger mode selected to 'tap' rather than 'signal' in appropriate programs. The tap-tempo mode is very useful indeed (although I would have liked a readout of the resulting delay time), and the System menu allows the tap tempo calculator to be set up to derive various fractions of the tapped timing -- either 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1, 2, or 3 times.

I was impressed with the depth and warmth of the reverbs, particularly the four-channel versions which, whilst creating very credible surround sound stages, also seemed to work well with only a stereo output. The dedicated stereo reverbs were also very natural and controllable, though perhaps without quite as much complexity as the four-channel versions, and I had no reservations about using any of them. They are easy to set up, with the size, spread and hi-damp parameters giving creative



GLOSSARY: technical terms explained

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flexibility in fine-tuning the sound, and the three main versions (plate, hall and room) all provide believable starting points.

The usual clutch of straightforward time-domain algorithms (repeat delays, phasing, flanging and chorus programs) all performed well and with a wide range of adjustment. I was also impressed with the pitch-shift algorithms, which produced very smooth results with modest settings, although mechanical-sounding results were unavoidable when pushed beyond a few tones up or down

The dynamics processors seemed to be the weakest functions, largely because I found them so difficult to set up. The problem was not in the adjustable parameters -- all the expected options were available with sensible ranges, together with some unusual combined functions such as 'sensitivity' in the compressor (which seemed to integrate the threshold and ratio controls). Both the compressor and limiter also include a two-band equaliser, which is useful. The real stumbling block for me was the absence of a gain-reduction meter, which made it hard to assess just how hard the machine was working (other than by ear, which can be surprisingly deceptive). With the benefit of my mixing console's metering (the input via an aux send level meter and the output by a PFL of the effects return) I was able to find comparable settings to those on my usual outboard compressors and I found the Sony gave a harder sound with less character, although it often provided greater precision in absolute level control. In reality, I don't believe the dynamics algorithms were intended for stand-alone mastering-type applications (despite some of the preset programs' titles) so this test was probably a little unfair. When used in conjunction with some of the other effects to control the processing on a solo instrument, however, they proved more than adequate.

### Conclusions

Overall, I liked the V55. It seemed to involve a lot of button-pushing and knob-twirling at first, but familiarity brought an appreciation of just how quick and easy it was to edit an existing program or to set one up from scratch -- the velocity-sensitive nature of the rotary encoder was a major asset in this regard. The sound quality is beyond reproach in all cases; the standard time-domain effects sound very clean on their own, and I rather liked the reverbs for their richness and controllability. I'm not suggesting the machine is on a par with a top-flight Lexicon for the naturalness of its reverbs, but it is certainly comparable with decent mid-market models

The four-channel surround-compatibility of the DPS V55M is unique, as far as I know, and makes it an ideal tool for anyone considering surround-sound production, yet still provides plenty of flexibility for run-of-the-mill stereo work or mono multitrack processing applications. The V55 is a good all-rounder and won't become redundant with the turn of the millennium. so if you are looking for a multi-effects machine for surround work, or are just starting out and want a machine you won't outgrow in a hurry (but which is easy to use), I would happily recommend it.

### information

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