

Far from taking the 'life' out of 'live', SIMON ALLEN finds that the MaxxBCL offers the chance to get live sound as close to perfection as possible.

Mastering has always been a hot topic of conversation. Whether you're working on post production, broadcast, or live sound, engineers are always striving for the best possible sound; concentrating all the time to optimise the source. With its new BCL unit, Waves offers a complete optimisation solution to the world of live sound, as well as post production or broadcast.

Overview

The first and obvious comment to make is how well the unit has been manufactured. The whole unit is a lot heavier than you would expect, and the housing looks and feels like it could take a bullet. All the switches and dials are robust and of a very high quality. My only nag at the ergonomics would be the switches on the rear, that might be caught whilst out on the road or when plugging or un-plugging cables. It would have been better to have recessed switches here.

The front panel is very clearly laid out and uses good LED switches and bright displays, making working in the dark really easy, which is great considering how often I find myself doing FOH in the dark. On the bottom left of the front panel are four presets to allow you to save your settings. These are very easily operated, you simply hold down the desired preset for a couple of seconds.



WAVES MAXXBCL

Triple Processor

The unit comes equipped with analogue in and out as well as digital, in the forms of SPDIF, AES, and Optical. There is also a word clock termination for syncing to other digital devices. This means the unit is very versatile in supporting up to 96kHz, 24bits, and also provides high-end AD/DA converters. The analogue I/Os can either be on balanced TRS jacks or XLR connectors both with individual ground lift switches. Each output offers calibration rotary screws to choose between six different dB settings.

First in the chain of three processors that can individually be bypassed, is the Renaissance compressor. You can select the compressor to be pre or post the bass enhancer. It has been designed from the Waves Renaissance Compressor and L2 Ultramaximizer software processors, both of which are highly acclaimed. You can select the attack time, the threshold, and the ratio and switch between 'Opto' or 'Electro' compressors. The 'Electro' compressor achieves a faster release time as the signal gain increases, and the 'Opto' has a longer release time as the signal gain increases.

The next processor along is the MaxxBass enhancer. There are three simple controls for this processor; one to select the intensity, one to select the frequency cut-off for the enhancer, and one to turn the High Pass Filter on and off. The HPF lets you remove or retain the original low frequencies. The MaxxBass bass enhancer simply adds degrees of harmonics to the signal that the ear perceives as low bass frequencies. This allows you to get a rich warm sound without over-straining the PA system, or any system where it might not quite deliver the lower frequencies.

Last on the front panel is the limiter. The limiter is modelled on Waves' famous L2 Ultramaximizer. The limiter combines a peak limiter, level maximiser, and dithering system that increases the digital resolution. The limiter is capable of a very fast overshoot-free response, giving you complete brick-wall limiting. There are three controls; threshold, output ceiling level, and a link button to link

the threshold and output ceiling controls. This keeps the ratio between them the same, allowing easy adjustments during a performance.

Maxing The Sound

The degrees at which you can operate the unit are vast. Using it to the max you get a massive sound on any system, and in the studio you can use its features to get some great effects. While using the unit across FOH in the venue, just having the unit working subtly really enhanced the whole room. You don't need to 'take the life out of live', in fact it enhances all the little details which can be lost particularly in a live environment. This makes it a versatile unit for all types of music on any system.

In the studio the MaxxBCL sounded very musical to my ears. The Increased Digital Resolution (IDR) and the Auto Release Control (ARC) algorithms along with the MaxxBass processor are very intuitive and seem to have a level of understanding of sound. Even with the unit working gently on a mix it starts to give you a stereo file that you can work with and you can expect it to sound great on any system. I also used the unit on a bass track in a mix and it was amazing to hear how much it had helped, not just for the studio speakers but out of the studio as well.

The bass enhancer is brilliant. It is very easy to apply and means you can confidently work on most PA systems. While it enhances the bass, you may also be pleased to hear that it doesn't generate feedback, or even low end rumble. The compressors and the limiter allow you to get as much from your system as you need without damaging your speakers, as well as giving your mix the characteristics of a record. I think there is also a point that might be easily missed, and that is how well all three processors work together. The limiter seems to behave much better with the compressor slightly ticking over.

Conclusion

This unit gives live engineers that last little bit of control to achieve near perfection. Without the unit it would be like a studio mixer taking a mix out of the studio without it going through the mastering process. You can mix as hard as you like on a live rig, but until you add that final stage you won't get your sound to the next level. The MaxxBCL offers a standard that touring engineers can take with them to get great results anywhere, which is often missing from live sound. With all that protection for your system and so much processing power in one very well constructed box, the Waves MaxxBCL is worth every penny.

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Ⓐ Waves Inc., 2800 Merchant's Drive, Knoxville, TN 37912
 Ⓣ +1 865 909 9200
 Ⓜ www.waves.com

Ⓐ UK Distributor: Sonic Distribution, Unit 23 Westbury Close, Townsend Industrial Estate, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Beds LU5 5BL
 Ⓣ +44 (0) 845 500 2500

THE REVIEWER

SIMON ALLEN is Stage and Studio Manager of High Barn.