SIDECHAIN EQ
Three bands for shaping the internal or external sidechain

AUTO ATTACK/ RELEASE
Set program-dependent timing

ADVANCED PANEL
Click to reveal the sidechain and range controls

DETECTION MODE
Seven L/R and M/S options

COMPRESSION RANGE
Restrict maximum gain reduction

SOUND DESIGN TIPS
Light up the bulb for first-call parameter suggestions

INPUT/OUTPUT LINK
Output goes down as Input goes up

RECOVERY TIME
Set Tube-STA's full release between two and eight seconds

GAIN REDUCTION
Every preset suggests the optimum range

DRY/WET MIX
Apply parallel compression with this modern nicety

COMPUTER **music** PERFORMANCE Award

Arturia
3 Compressors You'll Actually Use €199 PC MAC

The French music technology leviathans turn their analogue-modelling attention to dynamics with a trio of compressor plugins

> Toe-curlingly rubbish naming aside, Arturia's series of vintage plugin effect triple-headers has impressed us thus far, with 3 Filters You'll Actually Use and 3 Preamps You'll Actually use scoring 8/10 and 9/10 respectively in **cm**257.

3 Compressors You'll Actually Use (we cringe every time we say it) comprises VST/AU/AAX emulations of the Urei 1176 (Comp FET-76), DBX 165A (Comp VCA-65) and Gates Sta-Level (Comp Tube-STA) – see *The glorious originals* for details. Built on the company's ever-impressive proprietary TAE (True Analog Emulation) technology, they cover a good spectrum of vintage compression styles – FET, VCA and Tube. Also, although they're being pushed as a set, you can buy each one individually for €99.

Manuals you'll actually read
Each plugin opens to a friendly (but optional) guided tour, and plenty of technical assistance is made available in the shape of very detailed (but

not terribly well translated) manuals and the 'Sound Design Tips' feature introduced with Arturia's Pigments synth. This enables selected knobs to be highlighted by the preset designer when the light bulb button is moused over – indicating that they're the ones to reach for first when it comes to tweaking – and recommended gain reduction ranges to be drawn into the GR meter for visual reference. With so few knobs on each plugin, and compression being so heavily contextual (unlike synth sound design), the first part of this isn't particularly revelatory; but the gain reduction markers certainly prove useful.

All three have capable preset browsers; A/B preset comparison; dry/wet Mix control; Input/ Output linking for volume compensation; metering of Input, Output or Gain Reduction; and the pop-down Advanced panel. This last sees Arturia move from pure 1:1 emulation, housing a full sidechain section, and a Range control to set a dB cap on gain reduction,

regardless of other settings. The sidechain setup adds a new angle to these studio classics, for tailoring of the internal/external control signal. High and Low Pass filters and a sweepable Mid EQ band enable frequency shaping, while an array of Detection modes include Mid and Side options for all sorts of stereo manipulation, and a Listen button for monitoring.

FET-76 and VCA-65 also include a lookahead control (Time Warp) that not only makes the detection circuit 'see the future' by up to 5ms, but also holds it off by up to 10ms for a languid response. And VCA-65 includes an unorthodox Manual sidechain trigger button, which fires a full sine wave into the detection circuit when held or triggered with MIDI or automation.

Three of the best
On to the compressors themselves, then, and where better to start than everyone's favourite workhorse, the 1176? With its four fixed Ratios (4,

"An array of Detection modes include Mid and Side options for all sorts of stereo manipulation"

8, 12 and 20:1) plus a dedicated button for the famously aggressive 'All buttons in' or 'British' setting; super fast Attack (20-800 microseconds) and Release (50-1100ms) times; and that characterfully rich tonality, FET-76 is effortlessly transformative on drums, vocals and bass. The threshold is governed by the Ratio, making it very easy to set up, too.

VCA-65 includes the 'Peakstop' output limiter found on later revisions of the original unit, which allows for extreme compression without clipping, and also introduces its own impolite distortion if pushed. Most importantly, though, the DBX's 'over easy' soft knee and Auto Attack/ Release setting are in full effect, for smooth levelling of vocals and acoustic instruments.

Last but by no means least, the Tube-STA, emulating Retro Instruments' mid-noughties remake of the Gates Sta-Level, includes a three-stage Mode switch and Recovery Time knob (2-8s) that weren't present on the original, for greater control over timing. Double Mode comes closest to the lenient response of the original, while Single Mode has the slowest attack, and Triple pairs a fast attack with a relatively slow release. The threshold and ratio are entirely program dependent, however, and even with the hottest of inputs, the signal maintains its integrity, the only audible distortion being of the subtle harmonic kind.

Off the 'chain

Right from the off, it's apparent that Arturia have squarely nailed the sound and action of all three emulations, from the speed and warmth of the 1176, through the musicality and grit of the 165A, to the fattening and glue of the Sta-Level. A large part of that realism comes from the 'analogue' saturation and distortion that TAE captures so perfectly – the characteristic crunch of FET-76's All mode, for example, is utterly convincing, as is the less overt colouration across the board.

The Comp VCA-65 has its origins in the DBX 165A, a 70s VCA-style classic

The glorious originals

The three legendary hardware devices emulated by Arturia for 3 Compressors You'll Actually Use each represent a distinct era on the timeline of audio dynamics processing, and a specific technological paradigm.

The Gates Sta-Level – on which Tube-STA is ultimately based, via its 2006 Retro Instruments rebirth – was released in the 1950s as an automatic signal levelling solution for broadcast radio and TV. It eventually found favour with studio engineers for its valve-powered bass and vocal enhancing properties, and changes hands for silly money today, on the very rare occasion that one pops up for sale.

The world's first solid state compressor, Bill Putnam's Urei 1176 is considered by many to be the greatest of all time, and has certainly been the most ubiquitous since its launch in 1967. With its transistor-based circuitry blowing incumbent tube designs out of the water in terms of attack speed, it changed the studio landscape forever.

Another solid state design, the 1970s DBX 165A used VCA circuitry and a groundbreaking RMS (as opposed to peak) detection circuit, and featured an extremely soft knee transfer function and an automatic attack/release option for supremely natural sounding and easily adapted compression.

It's not only the historic accuracy, raw sonic excellence and stunning GUIs (resizable from 60-200%) that set 3 Compressors apart. The versatile sidechain really takes all three designs to another level, especially FET-76, which – surprisingly – is the only one of numerous virtual 1176s out there offering such functionality or anything like it.

Respectful in its adherence to the traditional, yet quietly radical in its modernisation, 3 Compressors You'll Actually Use is a classy, authentic trio of bona-fide audio engineering classics that we can't really find fault with. **cm**

Web arturia.com

Alternatively

**IK Multimedia T-RackS 5
cm252 » 09/10 » From €180**
Incorporates several classic compressors, including a very fab 1176 clone in the form of Black 76

**Native Instruments Vintage Compressors
NA » NA » £169**
Softube-coded emulations of the 1176, DBX 160 and Teletronix LA-2A

Verdict

For Three superb vintage compressors
Beautiful resizable GUIs
Very flexible sidechain options
Recommended gain reduction ranges are a nice touch

Against We wish there was an option to buy two for €149

Arturia's best effects bundle yet, these stonking plugins replicate and update three classics for the contemporary producer

10/10

The Advanced sidechain section takes Arturia's emulation to places the 1176 has never been before