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PRODUCT EVALUATION

Space Station: Blast From the Past

by Stephen Murphy

Chris Moore resigned his position as project manager at Lexicon and set off on his own to start a company called Ursa

Major. The initial goal of the company was to create a reasonably priced digital reverb — a daunting task in the analog world of 1977. The shoestring start-up outfit ultimately produced a unique effects processor called the Ursa Major Space Station SST-282, which debuted at the 1978 AES convention. The company's product gained attention and popularity among recording and broadcast facilities, eventually selling approximately 1,900 of the hand-built units in eight years.

Moore is back with his new company, Seven Woods Audio (named after the W.B. Yeats poem), and an updated version of his much-revered processor, renamed the Ursa Major Space Station SST-206, which retails for \$1,395.



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The shoestring start-up outfit ultimately produced a unique effects proces-

those almost-mythical vintage products that derive their aura from a unique sound and quirky interface.

The new Space Station bares little physical resemblance to its forbearer. Instead of a rack-mount sheet-metal enclosure, the SST-206 is a small, sleek enclosure mea-

suring 5 by 6.5 by 0.6 inches, about the size and thickness of a thin paperback book.

In fact, at first glance the SST-206 appears simply to be the remote control for a larger rack unit — nonexistent in this case.

Like the earlier model, the Space Station user interface consists of 10 knobs. Two additional soft knobs that select the various audition delay patterns and operating modes have replaced the multitude of push buttons found on the original.

The biggest departures from the original design are found on the inside of the unit. Instead of hundreds of ICs, a single 150 MHz 24-bit Motorola DSP chip handles processing duties.

Also gone from the internal circuitry are the early 11-bit floating-point A/D and D/A converters. Moore instead opted for an AES/EBU digital-only I/O design with no analog signal provisions.

Digital signals

Signal and power connections are made via a single permanent 12-foot cable that fans out into two XLR connectors for the AES digital I/O and a power supply with detachable IEC A/C connector. Digital signals are carried on AES-specified 110-ohm cable.

The Space Station is a unique processor that practically defies description in print. Perhaps it would be useful to say it combines elements of early Eventide, Quantec and Lexicon units with a dash of Delta Effectron and Roland Space Echo thrown in for good measure.

But the bottom line is that the Space Station is the kind of processor you need to play with to appreciate. Because it has no presets, it is different every time you play with it.

Unlike many such reissues/recreations of vintage gear that are hitting the market, designer Moore did not attempt to make a physical replica of the original. What he did instead was concentrate on duplicating the circuitry and sound of the original using a modern DSP processor as his breadboard.

Having had the privilege of using the vintage Space Station SST-282 for many years, I was stunned by Moore's recreation.

The Space Station does give the user some starting points by essentially dividing the unit's operation into three modes: SST Echo, SST Reverb and "Room." The first two modes comprise the recreation of the original Space Station, replicating the grain, grunge and limited (7 kHz) bandwidth of the SST-282. The Room mode is a new mode that uses the Motorola DSP to its fullest, resulting in a high-quality room ambience/reverb stereo processor while still claiming a unique sound not easily found in common processors.

The original and reissue Space Station are plainly most appropriate for use by creative engineers, producers and musicians — the sort who have the time, patience and want to pull the unique effect out of the hat and be the hero of the mix.

So what can the Space Station do for the modern broadcaster? Not a whole lot for

straight-and-narrow personalities. But for creative off-the-wall producers, morning shows, bumpers and jingles, it may be the cat's meow — or roar, depending on how one twiddles the knobs.

Beyond the new "Room" mode, essentially a high-quality reverb, the Space Station can be used in manners ranging from subtle enhancement to surprising and wild.

On the subtle side, the processor can be used as room ambience, a "loudness" enhancer, stereo widening and the like. Overt and frequently bizarre effects are just a few knob turns away, with effects ranging from straight and multi-tap echo/delay effects to comb filter and tuned resonant filter effects that are literally not available anywhere else.

In original 1978 Space Station literature posted on Seven Wood's site, Moore states that reverb effects have put "broadcast sound on the verge of a creative revolution." While not too far off the mark for the day, it seems a tad overstated today.

But for broadcast and studio professionals willing to invest a little time and money into the Ursa Major Space Station SST-206, the reward is a unique, fun and highly creative audio tool.

Stephen Murphy is a freelance engineer/producer with 20 years of experience in audio, radio and video production. 🌐

Product Capsule:

**Seven Woods Audio
Ursa Major Space Station
SST-206 Processor**

Thumbs Up



- ✓ Classy recreation of a classic effect
- ✓ Lots of knobs for infinite variation
- ✓ Previous circuitry duplicated on single DSP chip

Thumbs Down



- ✓ Digital inputs only
- ✓ Looks like a remote control

Price: \$1,395

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