

**LEN DAVIES  
managed to  
control his  
giggling long  
enough  
to review this  
amusingly  
named product.**

It was in 1985 that I was first introduced to the Aphex Aural Exciter C. I had just set up my humble eight-track studio and my friendly local music store lent me one to try out, knowing wryly that it wouldn't come back to the shop. At that time I was still mastering to my trusty Revox A77 quarter-inch and I was totally amazed at what this simple looking box could do. I, as many others, shared a knowing laugh over the name 'Aural Exciter', but continued to use the unit on practically every recording thereafter, sometimes on individual tracks and sometimes on the final mix. Sixteen years down the line the Aphex brand is still going strong and I've been presented with the new 204 'Aural Exciter and Optical Big Bottom', the big question is, will I want to send this one back?

### Description

The 204 is one-unit high, silver in color, has a locking power switch on the left of the front panel. The rest of it is divided into Channel 1 and 2 controls with process in and out buttons in the center. Each channel features three rotary controls for the Big Bottom aspect (Drive, Tune, and Mix) and three for the Aural Exciter (Tune,

but **the 204 seriously enhanced that without perceptibly adding to the peak level.** How this is achieved is naturally an Aphex secret, but caution is advised as it's too easy to become accustomed to and there is a danger of losing your neutral perspective, as I nearly did.

**Complete mixes gained an unquantifiable 'something' that did appear to make them rounder with greater depth, while individual instruments also benefited, giving my acoustic guitar a true sparkle while providing a rich all round body of sound that really allowed it to stand out in the mix.**

### Conclusion

**The applications of the 204 are many,** although you'd be forgiven for believing that this unit is primarily aimed at studio use. **The manual covers all possibilities** from nightclub sound systems to stage monitors, guitar, bass, and keyboard rigs and even Karaoke and stereo systems, and while it will be a boon in those environments there are a few that I could see would also benefit. We nearly always tend to forget multimedia production when it comes to reviewing audio-based



## AURAL EXCITER AND OPTICAL BIG BOTTOM

# APHEX 204

Harmonics, and Mix).

The rear of the unit is pretty standard featuring an IEC power socket, quarter-inch jack and XLR inputs and outputs, all of which are balanced, and a +4dB, to -10dB operating level switch. Even though the jacks are balanced it's possible to use unbalanced signals, and all of the wiring configurations needed are shown and explained in full, to enable compatibility all down the line.

As mentioned earlier, the grand total of six rotary controls per channel adjust everything, and in all cases 'Tune' indicates a frequency range, the Big Bottom range being 50Hz to 190Hz and the Aural Exciter range being 800Hz to 6kHz. The 'Drive' control on the Big Bottom section selects the optimal level for the process to work effectively and has an adjacent LED that should pulse depending on the bass peak being indicated, while the 'Harmonics control' in the Exciter section adjusts the level of harmonics being generated. The higher the setting, the more of an 'edge' is applied, which would probably be more useful for solo instruments than complete mixes.

Both sections feature a 'Mix' control as the final adjustment which does just that, as the Aphex systems have, in essence, two signal paths: the original unprocessed signal that bypasses the circuitry, and the path that becomes processed. The 'Mix' control allows the operator to decide exactly how much of the processed signal needs to be mixed into the original while the 'process in/out' buttons switch as appropriate.

### In Use

My studio system uses Acoustic Energy AE200 nearfield monitors that already provide an impressive low end,

models, but my experience of multimedia production leads me to believe that **material aimed for streaming, broadcast, and even DVD authoring will benefit from the application of the 204** prior to the final stages, and hence make even more of the enhanced playback systems we enjoy today.

**It's a solidly built and quiet unit,** and I was going to comment on the lack of a 'Stereo' switch for the obvious reasons until I realized that a little experimentation with the individual 'Tune' and 'Harmonics' controls did affect the perceived width and depth of the stereo image with no major phase problems. I have to give a major mention of the accompanying manual in that, not only does it explain about the unit as you'd expect, but it shows all of the possible wiring configurations in easy-to-understand diagrams, it explains all about the theory behind the processes taking place, and generally deserves a major ten out of ten.

**I can see many studios being 'lent one to try out', and as I was, being so blown away that they won't return it to the shop.** □

### INFORMATION

- 💰 Aphex 204 \$399.
- 📍 Aphex Systems Ltd, 11068 Randall St, Sun Valley, CA 91352, USA.
- 📞 818 767 2929.
- 📞 818 767 2641.
- 🌐 [www.aphex.com](http://www.aphex.com)