

Helios Electronics Ltd

The Legendary Helios Olympic EQ.

In the 60's a gentleman called Dick Swettenham worked as an Service/Design Engineer for Abbey Road Studios

In the early 70's he moved to work for the Legendary Olympic Studios, where he controlled Design and Maintenance. He approached the owners of Olympic, stating, that if they allowed him to order the necessary parts, He could build a desk that was far more musical than anything built at that time. They gave him the OK.

When the desk was completed and commissioned most of the great legendary musicians which included the famous "Jimi Hendrix Masters" started to book time at Olympic. Most British and some American recording artists were now using Olympic Studios so Chris Blackwell of Island Records decided that if he built a studio around a Helios Console he would save money and also have his own studio busy with artists wanting to record on the Helios.

But he was a client of Olympic, it would be impossible for him to request that Dick Swettenham of Olympic to build a consul that would be in direct competition with Olympic, so he put up the finance for Dick to go into business,

And so Helios was born, seven Console's were built for Island which included Mobile Studios.

At this time Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells" was selling well for Virgin Records, so Richard Branson had Helios build three Console's, 1 for The Manor Studios, one for the Manor Mobil, and one for Townhouse Studios.

The "Who" built Rampport Studios, around the Helios, The Rolling Stones built the legendary "Stones Mobile".

10cc Built Strawberry Studios and so the story goes on, even the Beatles built "Apple Studios" around a green Helios Consul, The Helios became known as the Musicians Choice of Recording Consuls.

Here is only part of the huge list of other famous owners.

Apple Records X 2,-----Basing Street Studios X 2,-----Berwick Street Studios,-----Dawnbreaker Studios, Los Angeles, USA,

John Entwistle,-----Funky Features, San Francisco, USA,-----Hansa Tonstudio, Berlin, W.Germany,-----

LaMaisonRouge,-----Alvin Lee,

HarryJ.Records, Kingston, Jamaica,-----IslandRecords, Ronnie Lane,-----Ronnie Lane's Mobile Studio,---

---Paul McCartney,

Magritte Studios,-----The Manor X 2,-----Steve Marriott,-----Steve Miller,-----San Francisco, USA,-----

Musicland, Munich,W.Germany,

Olympic Sound Studios,-----Rampport Studios,-----Rolling Stones Mobile,-----Eric Clapton,-----Leon

Russell, Los Angeles, USA

10cc Strawberry Studios,-----Telemetropole, Montreal, Canada,-----Topic Records,-----Universal Sound,--

----Steve Winwood,

Ron Wood,-----Townhouse Studios,-----The Who.

In 1988, I purchased my first Helios, it was the last one that Helios Built in 1979, I purchased it from "Townhouse Studios,".

Later I purchased the "Manor Mobile" and the Eric Clapton Console, I ended up with seven Helios's in my workshop, including the "Stones Mobile" that belonged to Tony Larking of Larking Audio.

With all these Helios Console's to hand I set about finding which was the most musical sounding, I discovered there were roughly four different types of design, dating from the first one built at Olympic Studios.

Dick Swettenham had heard that I had all of these Helios's here and telephoned me, to ask if he could visit, We had so much in common as to what the sound of a Console should have, we both agreed that the most versatile EQ was the last one that he built for Townhouse Studios, = Type 78 Active.

Dick was very pleasantly surprised by my knowledge of his Console's, the amount of schematics and information that I had collected over the years, he endorsed me to service Helios, as he had never ever

found the time, he had also lost most of the schematics and information when Helios Electronics Ltd closed down in 1979, , but he left me what remaining files that he had.

In 1994 I loaned him a Type 78 to clone, while I continued to maintain and support those that were still in use throughout the world, later he returned my Type 78, complete with drawings for the first prototype, in the meantime I had contacted various respected Engineers/Producers, they felt that the best sounding Mic/EQ was the ones that he first built using a Lustraphone Input Transformer which utilised the Centre Tap as a 20dB pad, this was the main Type 69 Mic/Pre plus Passive EQ, although not as versatile as the Type 78 they all felt the Type 69 was without doubt the best sounding.

April 1997, I approached Dick to clone the Type 69, but he stressed that due to unforeseen circumstances he had not had time to complete the type 78, and also to find the finance and the time involved to work on both Types was impossible, we agreed that I should clone the Type 69, 3 months later, we sent Dick a Type 69, he agreed that it was such a perfect clone, it had even inherited the problems of the original.

i.e. 1 Db 100 Hz boost, with its EQ switched out, the unit ran at .775 as opposed to today's standard of plus 4dB, it also oscillated when on full Mic Gain, but the sound was identical.

We solved these inherited problems one at a time, by making comparison checks with the originals at each stage of the modifications.

In September 1997, I had to visit Helioscentric Studios, to diagnose problems in the Helios Console housed there.

It was a real mess, an engineer had tried to interface one of the early Island Desks with the Ex Alvin Lee Console. It was tragic, we managed to get the desk working, to enable track laying, but it still had many problems, time was booked for us to return to complete the work, but before we left I took the opportunity to fit two of the new Type 69 alongside 18 of the originals, this would give every engineer/producer using the Helios the opportunity to compare the old with the new.

When we returned some weeks later, we were asked could we completely re-build the desk with all of our New Mic/EQ's, plus new Grouper/Aux Modules and a complete new 48 Channel Monitor Section.

The original Mic/EQ's that came from the Desk went to collectors in the USA, they were sold within one week.

Dick was ill at this time, but was very anxious to see the first new Helios Consul since 1979, but sadly Dick Swettenham passed away in the April of that year, the Industry owes him a gratitude for his contributions, he did everything he could to improve the quality of music recording, he never wished for financial gain, neither did he have any ego problems, he was a modest man, with a love for music, he had two assets, one was a technicians brain the other a musicians mind, I have met many Technical Designers in my 50 years in the Music Business, most have had that image that I have learnt to expect, but when Dick Swettenham walked into my workshop he looked more like a Rock Musician than a technician, but when we got talking I immediately understood why his Console's were desired by musicians all over the world. Having now purchased the original registered company, Helios Electronics Ltd, I only hope that I can continue his work as well as he did.

We are at this moment doing the final tests, to come up with the full Technical Specifications on our new product the Helios 1U Twin Type 69 Rack EQ.

I have also enclosed a Web-Link to helioscentric studios, the Studio using one of our refurbished original Helios Desks, but utilising our own new type 69 EQ's and Grouper Module's as well as two of our 24 Channel Monitor Desks.

This desk was purposely re-built for Elvis Costello, and Paul Weller named an album after it

<http://www.helioscentric.co.uk>

Best Regards,



Tony.
Tony Arnold,
(Director Helios Electronics Ltd)