

C A S E S T U D Y

PSD300 for Private Music Instruction

by Alisdair MacRae Birch, Guitarist/Bassist/Educator/Arranger

As a teacher and transcriber the PSD300 has proved invaluable.

As part of my teaching philosophy I feel it is essential to tailor music education to the individual goals of each student. I teach a wide variety of students, whose musical goals vary, and who are interested in a range of music genres – Jazz, Rock, Blues, Bluegrass, and African/Caribbean music. I tailor my instruction to their needs, and the PSD300 fits well into that. I'll take an example of how I use it in teaching.

The student brings to their lesson, a CD of an artist they want to learn more about. I place the CD in to the top-loading bay of the PSD300 and press play to listen to the track. First we map out the overall structure of the tune, noting verses, choruses, bridges then we pick up the chords and harmony, writing out a chord chart of the tune. Next we pick out small sections, which might be of particular interest, a picking pattern, a particular chord voicing, and a solo section.

Selecting sections is easy. Whilst the CD is playing you simply press the A-B button to set the section where you want to repeat. Point A (starting point) is set when the A-B button is pushed and released. The next push and release of the A-B button sets point B (ending point). Another cool feature is that if during the A-B loop play you press the A-B button again, point B becomes the new A point and the next push and release of the A-B button sets a new B point, and that way you can “dogleg” along a section of music. Furthermore, if you want to just cover more of a section you can keep the existing A point but make a new B point by holding the A-B button for a second and then pushing and releasing the A-B button to set a new B point. It's a little “fiddly” at first, but you soon get the hang of it. Two other features are really useful. You can control the tempo of the track in increments of 1%. All you do is simply press the minus or plus tempo buttons. You can also control the pitch of the playback by pressing the

key buttons marked with a flat or sharp symbol. All these buttons are easily accessible on the top of the recorder.

These two features are great for transcribing. Whilst you are looping an A-B section you can slow it down to make it even easier to transcribe. The key adjust button is great for adjusting the pitch of recordings so you can transcribe at standard pitch, rather than retuning your instrument. Also whilst working with play-along recording such as Jamey Aebersold you can adjust the key of a whole track enabling you to take the same track and practice improvisation in different keys.

One of the great things about the PSD300 is it's almost one touch ability to convert CD tracks to half speed. You can simply place the CD in the top and insert a blank CD-R in the CDR drive. Select the program button to program the tracks you wish to record. Then you select the recording mode in this case Convert to Half Speed and then press the record button. Once complete you press the finalize button, and now you have CD with a half-speed rendition of the track. The PSD300 has great connections to the outside including XLR, level controls, line in/outs, digital in/out. As a teacher I found a useful way to set it up is to have the guitar plug into the unit and then take a mix out of the unit, in that way, I can blend the guitar sound better with the recording so you can get a much closer match. Also it enables me to improvise with a play along track as an example demonstration to the student.

All in all, the Superscope PSD300 has proved to be an invaluable addition to my teaching and transcribing toolset.

Copyright © 2003 Alisdair MacRae Birch

About the author

Alisdair MacRae Birch is a British musician and jazz guitarist/bassist currently teaching and playing in NY. He has performed through out Europe and West Africa, appeared on TV and radio and played in theatre orchestras.



Alisdair Macrae Birch
alisdair@alisdair.com
www.alisdair.com