PHIL SPEISER

THE_SPICE 2

USER MANUAL

One knob. Instant excitement — density, detail and air that follow the music, plus tube HEAT when you want warmth.

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The latest version is always at philspeiser.com/manual/the_spice-2

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What It Is

THE_SPICE 2 is a one-knob **enhancer**. Turn the big INTENSITY dial and your sound gets more exciting: quiet detail comes forward, the mix gets denser and more forward, the low end gains weight, and the top end opens up with air that never turns harsh — all at once, all musically balanced against each other.

The heart is a **3-band upward/downward compression engine**: each band lifts the quiet content *up* and tames the peaks *down* at the same time, so density and detail rise together without the mix falling apart. On top of it sits **SPARK**, the air: a smooth top-end lift plus two dynamic high-frequency paths that are **program-dependent** — they add detail only when the music is dull and get out of the way when it's already bright. That's the trick that makes THE_SPICE 2 so hard to make harsh.

And when a source wants colour, not just excitement, there's **HEAT**: a tube stage right after the multiband core that adds warm, even-harmonic saturation. It's off until you light it.

Version 2 distills all of that to a radically simple surface: **one hero dial, the HEAT tube on its face, two module switches — SPARK with its own built-in amount — and a handful of utilities**, with one-click **CALIBRATE** to stage your input and one-click **GAIN MATCH** so louder never fools you.

Why You'll Love It

- **One knob to great.** INTENSITY drives the whole engine in a single, carefully voiced gesture — 0% is a true bypass, 100% is the classic sweet spot, 200% is full send.
- **It never gets harsh.** The air paths listen to the program and duck themselves the moment the signal is already bright. Enhancement, not hype.
- **Two flavours, one click.** SPICE is the multiband core — density, detail, weight. SPARK is the air — top-end detail and sheen. Run both, or solo the one the track needs — and the SPARK pill doubles as a level: drag it to set exactly how much air is added.
- **Warmth on demand.** Click the tube on the dial and HEAT adds tube warmth to the enhanced signal. It follows INTENSITY, so the more you spice, the warmer it gets — and the tube glows brighter to show it.
- **Honest by design.** CALIBRATE stages your input to the engine's sweet spot in one click; GAIN MATCH levels your output so every A/B compares tone, not volume.
- **Driven hard, it stays polite.** A soft ceiling after the engine means the enhanced signal never exceeds 0 dB before your output trim — slam it and it just gets denser.
- **Parallel MIX without side effects** — blend at any setting with no hollow, phasey sound.
- **Reads at a glance.** Twin-ladder IN/OUT meters with peak-hold readouts and a -6 dB staging marker show you exactly where you sit.
- **Automate the moves that matter.** INTENSITY, MIX and the SPARK amount are automatable in your DAW. Undo/redo on the surface, multilingual tooltips (EN/DE/FR/ES/IT), in-app docs and an AI assistant.

The Interface at a Glance

One page, no menus:

- **INTENSITY** — the big central dial with its signature tick ring and a single percentage readout (0–200%).
- **HEAT** — the small tube on the dial's face, under the INTENSITY caption. Click it to light it (orange) or switch it off (grey outline). Off by default.
- **Control panel** — the raised panel under the dial. Its top row holds the **SPICE | SPARK** pill switches; at least one of them is always on. While SPARK is on, its fill is a liquid level: drag the pill vertically to set the **SPARK amount** (full = 100%). Its bottom row holds the IN trim with the **CALIBRATE** pill next to it, MIX in the center, **GAIN MATCH** with its RESTORE | -6 mode toggle, and the OUT trim.
- **IN / OUT meter rails** on the far left and right — twin ladders with peak-hold lines and dB readouts.
- **Top bar** — undo/redo, AI assistant, documentation, settings and bypass.

Controls — In Depth

INTENSITY

What it does: The one knob. Drives the entire engine — the multiband upward/downward compression and the SPARK air rise together along a single voiced curve, and so does HEAT when it's lit.
Range/units: 0–200% (default 100%). Drag vertically; Shift-drag for fine moves; mouse wheel steps; double-click resets to 100%; right-click to type a value. Automatable in your DAW.
In your music: 0% is a true bypass — your audio passes through completely untouched. Up to 100% you're in "always sounds right" territory — the classic voicing. Past 100% the engine digs progressively deeper into density and excitement, up to full send at 200%.
Pro tip: Find your setting with your eyes closed, then run GAIN MATCH and A/B with bypass. If the matched version still sounds better, keep it. Higher settings also get louder — never judge without matching.

SPICE (module switch)

What it does: The multiband heart — 3-band upward/downward compression. Lifts quiet detail per band and tames peaks per band, so the sound gets denser and more forward and the low end gains weight.
Range/units: On/off (default on). At least one of SPICE/SPARK always stays on — click the last one that's on and the pill tells you: ONE STAYS ON.
In your music: Density, detail and loudness-feel. This is the "make it a record" half.
Pro tip: SPARK off, SPICE only: a thickener for drums, bass and full mixes when the top end is already where you want it.

SPARK (module switch + amount)

What it does: The air — a smooth top-end lift plus two dynamic high-frequency paths that lift top-end detail *only when the program is dull* and duck themselves when it's already bright. The pill is also the **SPARK amount**: its fill is a liquid level showing how much of the voiced spark is applied.
Range/units: Click = on/off (default on; at least one of SPICE/SPARK always stays on). Amount: drag the pill vertically, 0–100% (default 100%); Shift-drag for fine moves; mouse wheel steps; double-click refills to 100%; right-click to type it. The amount is **relative** — it scales the spark the engine would add at your current INTENSITY, so it tracks the dial instead of fighting it. The amount is automatable in your DAW (it appears as "Spark").
In your music: Sheen, openness, presence — without the fatigue of a static high boost, because it self-regulates against the program. Love the SPICE at your setting but the added air is a touch much? Drain the pill a little instead of touching INTENSITY.
Pro tip: SPICE off, SPARK only: a de-dulling treatment for vocals, acoustic instruments and buses that need light, not weight — and the amount sets exactly how much light.

HEAT (the tube)

What it does: Tube warmth. HEAT sends the signal through a tube stage right after the multiband core (before the SPARK air), which adds warm, mostly even-order harmonics — the rounder, thicker kind of

saturation. It's level-compensated inside, so it adds colour rather than volume.
Range/units: Click the tube to switch HEAT on or off (default off). How hard the tube is driven follows INTENSITY: at 100% it runs at its voiced amount, at 200% one and a half times that, and at 0% the whole plugin is bypassed. HEAT is independent of SPICE and SPARK and doesn't count toward the "one stays on" rule. It's saved with your session and undoable; it isn't an automation lane.
In your music: Body and roundness on vocals, bass and synths; a glued, warmer feel on buses. Because it rides INTENSITY, the dial keeps doing everything — one move gives you more excitement and more warmth together.
Pro tip: A/B HEAT on and off with GAIN MATCH run first. If the sound only seems better because it's thicker, pull INTENSITY back a little and listen again.

IN (input trim)

What it does: Trims the level feeding the engine — everything inside reacts to the level you set here. It behaves like a channel trim, never a drive control.
Range/units: -24 to +24 dB (default 0). Drag vertically; Shift-drag for fine moves; double-click resets; right-click to type a value.
In your music: The engine's voicing is anchored around peaks hitting **-6 dB**. Staging into that pocket makes every INTENSITY setting land the way it was designed.
Pro tip: Don't guess — use CALIBRATE. Or watch the IN rail and nudge the trim until the held-peak readout sits near the -6 marker.

CALIBRATE (pill, next to IN)

What it does: One-click input staging. Click, play your loop; after 2 seconds of audio (silence doesn't count — the fill visibly stalls) the IN trim is set so your incoming peaks land on the -6 dB sweet spot. Click again to cancel.
Range/units: One click — sets the IN knob for you. Undoable.
In your music: Perfect staging in one gesture, on any source, at any gain.
Pro tip: Make it a habit: insert → CALIBRATE → play → then reach for INTENSITY. Two seconds of loop and the whole plugin is calibrated to your track.

MIX

What it does: Parallel blend between the untouched signal and the enhanced signal. The dry signal stays perfectly aligned with the processed signal, so any blend stays free of hollow, phasey artifacts.
Range/units: 0–100% (default 100%). Drag vertically; Shift-drag for fine moves; double-click resets; right-click to type a value. Automatable in your DAW.
In your music: Classic parallel enhancement — run INTENSITY hot and blend back for density that keeps the original's dynamics on top.
Pro tip: For drum buses try INTENSITY around 150–200% with MIX at 40–60%: deep multiband action underneath, natural transients on top.

GAIN MATCH (pill, next to OUT) — RESTORE -6

What it does: One-click output leveling with two modes, selected on the pill's lower row. **RESTORE** sets the OUT trim so the output loudness matches the incoming signal — the honest-A/B mode. **-6** sets the OUT trim so output peaks land on the -6 dB sweet spot — the gain-staging mode, ideal for feeding the

next processor in a calibrated chain. Click the upper part of the pill, play your loop; after 2 seconds of audio the OUT knob is set. Click again to cancel.
Range/units: One click — sets the OUT knob for you. Undoable. Mode toggle: RESTORE (default) or -6.
In your music: RESTORE for judging what INTENSITY is really doing; -6 for building console-style chains where every stage sees a predictable level.
Pro tip: The OUT rail readout follows the mode — in RESTORE aim for the OUT and IN numbers to match, in -6 aim the held output peak at **-6**. When the readout brightens, you're there.

OUT (output trim)

What it does: Final level trim after the engine.
Range/units: -24 to +24 dB (default 0). Drag vertically; Shift-drag for fine moves; double-click resets; right-click to type a value.
In your music: Manual make-up or attenuation — usually written for you by GAIN MATCH.
Pro tip: However hard you push the engine, its internal soft ceiling keeps the pre-OUT signal at or below 0 dB — so OUT is genuinely the last word on level, and a safety clip catches manual boosts.

IN / OUT Meter Rails

What it does: Twin-ladder meters on both edges. In each rail the dim left column is the raw incoming signal (the untouched reference); the bright right column is the signal that matters there — IN rail: post-trim (what the engine sees, with the **-6 marker**); OUT rail: the processed output. Bright dashes are peak-hold lines; the readout on top shows the held value.
Range/units: -60 to 0 dB grid; peak-hold with slow decay; the IN readout brightens when the held peak sits in the -9…-3 pocket.
In your music: Same grid left and right — volume matched means equal bar heights. Staging and honesty at a glance.
Pro tip: The readouts hold long enough to fine-tune against: trim IN to put its number on -6, then let GAIN MATCH handle the OUT side.

Bypass / Undo / Settings / AI Assistant / Documentation (top bar)

What it does: Click-free bypass for true A/B, undo/redo of your moves (including applied CALIBRATE/GAIN MATCH results and HEAT on/off), settings (language, tooltips, default view), the in-app AI assistant and the built-in docs.
Pro tip: Bypass + GAIN MATCH (RESTORE) is the only honest test of an enhancer. If matched-on doesn't beat bypass, turn INTENSITY down until it does.

Visual Feedback & Metering

- **The tick ring** around the dial fills with a three-colour gradient as INTENSITY rises — position readable across the room.
- **Percentage readout** in the dial (0–200%) above the INTENSITY caption; the number turns bold and white while you hover or drag.
- **The HEAT tube** is a grey outline when off and glows orange when lit. Its glow follows INTENSITY — dim near 0%, brightest at 200% — so you can see how hard the tube is being driven.
- **The SPARK pill's fill** is its amount — a full pill is the stock 100%, a drained one shows at a glance that the air is trimmed back, and shows its % whenever it is below 100%.
- **CALIBRATE / GAIN MATCH pills** fill left-to-right with the listen window's progress (the fill stalls in silence, so you can see it's waiting for audio) and flash a confirmation when their result lands.
- **Peak-hold rails** with -6 staging marker (IN always; OUT in -6 match mode) and held-value readouts that brighten on target.
- **Multilingual tooltips** (EN/DE/FR/ES/IT) on every zone, and a clear bypassed state from the top-bar power button.

How to Use It — Real-World Workflows

The 20-second insert (any source)

1. Insert THE_SPICE 2. Click **CALIBRATE**, play your loop for 2 seconds.
2. Turn **INTENSITY** until it feels exciting (start around 100%).
3. Click **GAIN MATCH** (RESTORE), let it listen, then A/B with **Bypass**.
4. Keep the setting only if matched-on wins. Done.

Drum bus density

1. CALIBRATE, then push **INTENSITY** to 150–200% — deep multiband lift.
2. Pull **MIX** back to ~50% for parallel weight with the dry transients on top.
3. SPARK off — or just drag its amount down — if the cymbals are already bright. GAIN MATCH, A/B, done.

Vocal presence without sibilance pain

1. CALIBRATE on the vocal. Keep **SPICE + SPARK** both on, INTENSITY 80–120%.
2. The air paths self-duck on bright sibilant moments — push until presence appears, back off if you hear the top working.
3. GAIN MATCH in RESTORE mode before you judge anything.

Warm it up (vocals, bass, synths)

1. CALIBRATE, set INTENSITY where the excitement feels right.
2. Click the **HEAT** tube. Listen for roundness and body rather than more top.
3. Too thick? Pull INTENSITY down a touch — HEAT follows it. Want the warmth without the air? Drain the SPARK pill.
4. GAIN MATCH, then A/B with Bypass.

Calibrated chain stage (mix bus / mastering)

1. CALIBRATE the input, set INTENSITY modestly (60–100%).
2. Switch GAIN MATCH to **-6** and run it: the output now peaks at the -6 sweet spot — the perfect level for the next calibrated processor.
3. Chain the next stage and repeat the same staging discipline there.

Full send as an effect

1. INTENSITY to 200%, MIX 100%. The engine digs as deep as it goes and the soft ceiling keeps it dense but controlled.

2. Automate INTENSITY from your DAW for builds and drops — 0% is completely untouched, so sweeping up from zero is a true "effect on" gesture. Ride MIX or the SPARK amount alongside it for finer control.

Pro Tips & Creative Techniques

- **CALIBRATE first, always.** The voicing is anchored at -6 dB peaks — two seconds of staging makes every other control behave as designed.
- **INTENSITY at 0% is a true bypass.** Automating from 0% upward is a genuine bypass-to-effect ride with no switching artifacts.
- **Match before you judge.** RESTORE mode exists because enhanced + louder always "wins". Take loudness off the table and let your ears decide.
- **Solo the modules.** SPICE-only is a thickener; SPARK-only is a brightener. Both together is the record-ready default.
- **Light the tube for colour, not volume.** HEAT is level-compensated and follows INTENSITY — set the dial first, then decide whether the source wants the warmth.
- **Trim the spark, not the spice.** If the balance is right but the air is slightly too much, drag the SPARK pill's level down a touch — it scales with INTENSITY, so the ride stays voiced.
- **Parallel it.** MIX blends with no phasey side effects — hot INTENSITY with 40–60% MIX is the classic pro move on buses.
- **Use -6 mode to build chains.** Every processor after THE_SPICE 2 sees a calibrated level; your whole chain becomes repeatable across songs.
- **Trust the self-ducking.** If a chorus gets bright, the air backs off by itself. Set INTENSITY for the verse and let the engine ride the rest.
- **Undo covers the one-click tools.** Applied CALIBRATE and GAIN MATCH results are undoable — experiment freely.

Quick Start

1. **Insert** THE_SPICE 2 on a track or bus.
2. **CALIBRATE** — click, play 2 seconds of your loop.
3. **Turn INTENSITY up** until it excites you (100% is the sweet spot, 200% is full send).
4. **Optional: click the HEAT tube** if the source wants warmth.
5. **GAIN MATCH** — click, let it listen.
6. **Bypass** to A/B at equal loudness. If it wins, it stays.

Specs

- **Plugin type:** One-knob multiband enhancer / exciter (dynamic, program-dependent).
- **Engine:** 3-band upward/downward compression core; SPARK air stage (static top-end lift plus two program-dependent high-frequency paths); optional HEAT tube stage (level-compensated, even-harmonic); phase-matched parallel MIX; soft ceiling (pre-OUT signal never exceeds 0 dB) with a final safety clip.
- **One-click tools:** CALIBRATE (stages input peaks to -6 dB) and GAIN MATCH (RESTORE loudness match / -6 peak staging), each listening for 2 seconds of audio (silence doesn't count), both undoable.
- **SPARK amount:** the SPARK pill doubles as a relative 0–100% level for the air module — 100% = the full voiced amount at the current INTENSITY.
- **HEAT:** on/off (default off), drive follows INTENSITY; saved with the session.
- **Automation:** INTENSITY (0–200%), MIX (0–100%) and the SPARK amount (0–100%) can be automated from your DAW.
- **UI:** Single-page surface with UI zoom, multilingual tooltips (EN/DE/FR/ES/IT), in-app docs and AI assistant.
- **Formats: VST3, AU (macOS), AAX** - macOS (Apple Silicon & Intel) and Windows. No standalone version.

Stuck, or found something this manual doesn't cover? Write to me at philspeiser.com/support. I answer support myself.