Audio Ease Altiverb 6XL

Audio Ease has gone back to basics, re-coding Altiverb for Intel Macs, Windows, and TDM following the demise of the Altivec engine that gave the plug-in its name. GEORGE SHILLING is impressed.

THE LONGEST-ESTABLISHED PLUG-IN convolution reverb has gone up another version number and splits into two price points. Generously, the flying Dutchmen make the basic version 6 (normally 499 Euros +VAT) a free upgrade for version 5 owners. However, in the basic version, the Dutch have capped sample rates at 96kHz and done away with surround reverb. If you need rates up to 384kHz, surround, or the new TDM version (with a few caveats explained below), 6XL must be paid for, and starting from scratch this version is significantly more expensive (849 Euros + VAT). The Dutch have doubled their efforts to re-code for new versions and processors. Altiverb was named after the Altivec engine of the Macintosh's Power PC processor. Altiverb made specific use of this processor to provide a process for a few hundred pounds that had previously required hardware costing thousands. But with the latest version, the Dutch have courageously tackled Intel processors, Windows compatibility and TDM processing. Now,

all major plug-in formats are covered, including VST and Audio Units.

The software comes on two CDs stuffed into a DVD case, along with that rare beast, a printed manual. Inside the front cover is a serial number, which you can enter on the Audio Ease website to initiate an iLok licence deposit. Following straightforward installation, you're up and running. Included on the discs are all the impulse responses (IRs) that are also provided on the Audio Ease website. This has grown into an incredible library, and new responses are still posted every few weeks. There is a menu item to check for updates, but it's not clear whether this is for software version or IRs.

The plug-in window seems ever larger, and will easily occupy more than a third of the screen on most systems. But going from version 5 to 6, the most immediately noticeable change is the new IR Browser located in the main window. (Waterfall and Waveform are still available via tabs.) This replaces the previous drop-down list, and includes features that Microsoft and Apple could learn from. Split into two windows, the category folders in the left side open with one click to reveal locations. The really clever feature is simply that the list auto-scrolls to allow all contained folders to be visible without having to click or drag scroll bars. Previous folders are also auto-closed, unless you're holding down a modifier for comparison of more than one response. You can even toggle the text between two sizes. A click on a location reveals the multiple individual impulse responses (using different mic positions, for example) in the right window, and a click on one of these loads it; a new option lets you load IRs with or without changing global settings such as Reverb Time. This also loads some information and a picture

into the Info panel on the right of the window, but hovering the mouse over other impulses reveals their info and picture. The system is intuitive, elegant and straightforward. To maximise power from a TDM system, a series of versions of the plug-in is provided, using different amounts of TDM chips with corresponding maximum reverb time and channel configurations. It is obviously a struggle to make this work, as Altiverb can only use the four chips with extra memory on an HD Accel card. Using all four chips provides just one mono to stereo Altiverb with a maximum reverb setting of 8.5 seconds at 44.1kHz. There is promise of V6.1 with support for Process (non-Accel) cards, but it was not available at the time of writing, and may tax these older cards even more heavily. If you're using a powerful Mac with just one or two HD Accel cards, the provision of TDM processing is of limited use, as Altiverb pummels the TDM cards rather heavily, to say the least. It is, however, handy to have this option if you're running lots of RTAS or ReWire instruments.

Most controls and features, apart from the new browser, remain unchanged from V5, but there are a few improvements that tidy things up, such as sensibly moving the test buttons to near the level controls, and new options for triggering the test sounds via the Qwerty keyboard. The snapshot memories, or Automation Presets, have expanded from 10 to 40 slots. In V5, automating these via Pro Tools was the only way of automating some of the settings, but now almost all controls appear in the automation menu. Or at least, they are supposed to; at the time of writing there was a bug in V6.0.6 that obliterated many of these parameters from the automation menu when using a control surface, and had me temporarily mystified. There were also a couple of extra test versions in the plug-in list that repeatedly caused Pro Tools to 'unexpectedly' quit, although of course I soon grew to expect it! Hopefully these bugs will have been ironed out by the time you read this.

Any convolution reverb (and there are plenty around now) is only as good as its library. Audio Ease knows this, and its development team obviously has great enthusiasm for capturing new and interesting responses. Since we last looked, many more postproduction ambiences have been added, with lots of great small spaces. Furthermore, the Gear folder has now expanded to include a comprehensive selection from the Lexicon 480L and the AMS RMX-16. The real hardware is still better, but these are very good in the context of most mixes. There are a couple of extra sports stadia, and all the excellent concert halls, churches and cathedrals remain. Apart from improved compatibility, the killer feature is the new browser, which makes IR selection far easier. Altiverb is undoubtedly still the king of convolution plugs. Going Dutch has never seemed so appealing... ■

PROS	Still the class leader; excellent new IR browser; support for Windows, TDM, and Intel Mac; lower native processor overhead in Mac RTAS.
CONS	Difficult to keep up with all the latest convolution releases; big window; heavy processor load, especially if using TDM; a few bugs and instabilities in V6.0.6.

Contact
AUDIO EASE, THE NETHERLANDS:
Website: www.audioease.com