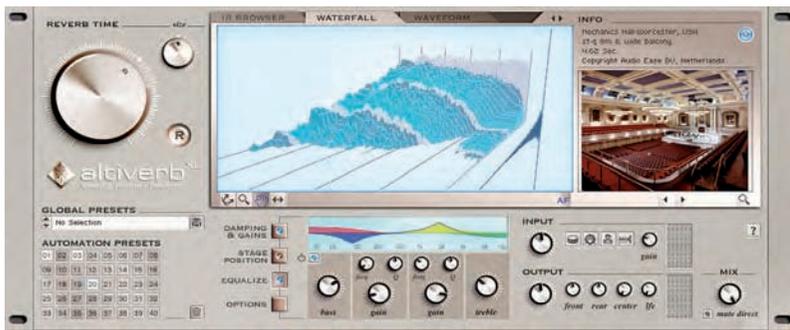


# Audio Ease Altiverb & Speakerphone 2

As definitive processing abilities go there aren't many hardware boxes that don't have at least one plug-in 'equivalent'. However, there are a number of processing skillsets that remain unique to the plug-in world. **ROB JAMES** considers the latest incarnations of two worthy contenders.



Of late I've been musing on the relative merits of hardware outboard versus plug-ins. Hardware takes up physical space and uses more electricity while plug-ins occupy disk space and use up precious processor power (or DSP chips). However, in five years time at least some of the hardware boxes will be saleable while very few plug-ins will. Many find it hard to part with the wonga for a plug-in when they could have yet another 19-inch rackmount unit for more or less the same price. But, on the other hand, there is Altiverb and Speakerphone from Audio Ease.

Convolution reverb and modelling has always had promise. The first incarnations I tried were the gigantic and expensive Sony hardware box (with an air of 'radiogram' about it) and the then Sonic Foundry, now Sony, Sound Forge Acoustic Mirror plug-in. Early convolution was convincing sometimes but cumbersome, slow, greedy on resources and somewhat limited in scope. Of course, much better convolution products have come along, not least the Waves IR-1 and Voxengo offerings, but there are still essential attributes to evaluate that will make or break a convolution reverb in a busy studio environment.

The basic principles behind convolution reverb and device modelling are now well enough known not to require further rehearsal here. Convolution plug-ins are available at prices varying between free and almost a lot. The factors that mark out certain products from the herd are these: a large and expanding library of freely downloadable IR (Impulse Response) samples recorded with meticulous attention to detail; additional controls; modifiers; the user interface; and the processing overhead. There is little point in having a convolution plug-in that sounds great but has few samples, is a pain to operate and uses a vast amount of resources. Altiverb comes with a vast library of IR samples covering not just musical requirements, concert halls, churches, and studios but also hardware, small rooms and exotic and wacky spaces.

Altiverb and Speakerphone 2 both present an excellent and largely intuitive control interface with plenty of visual aids to help clarify what is going on.



the keyboard. Global and Automation presets help to manage parameter sets within projects and across machines. IR loading is almost instant on my modest quad-core. This is good news but it would all be for naught if Altiverb was a resource hog. With the update to V6.3 last year CPU load was reduced considerably. Now with V6.3.3 the memory footprint has been reduced by between 30 and 50%. These efficiency gains do not come at the expense of diminished functionality or sound quality. Tighter coding and clever programming have resulted in an amazingly lean convolution reverb bulging with attractive features.

The stream of new IR samples from Audio Ease seems to be never ending and they are all free to registered users: 25 small rooms, cupboards, toilets, living rooms, bathrooms, arrived in the summer and will make my life considerably easier. A bunch of samples gathered together under the title 'next door' are the perfect answer to several problems encountered frequently in sound for picture — very convincing. Two of the most recent additions are the Amsterdam Singelkirk, a popular recording venue and, to judge by the sound it produces here, justifiably so, and the MCO broadcast recording studios. The Choir Studio MCO 4 is a peach.

Although I have other convolution reverbs at my disposal they are rarely used — too much of a hassle and resource hungry. The new incarnation of Altiverb is a completely different matter. With a wealth of samples I can use straight out of the box, it has a really nice GUI and low overheads. This is one plug-in that justifies its price.

Speakerphone is a convolution based loudspeaker, mic and amp simulator with environment and

manipulation options. In short you can create an entire scene using this single plug-in. George Shilling loved the first version when he reviewed it in *Resolution* V7.1. In Speakerphone 2 the user interface has grown by maybe 25% to accommodate new modules and clicking in an edit field now pops up a larger floating window with that parameter in it. There is also more room in the speaker browsers because there are now a lot more samples to browse. These include 20 new vintage and modern guitar amps and cabinets for a total of 32 with hundreds of mic positions to choose from. There are 25 new telephones and 15 mic samples. Still more vintage radios, phones, answering machines and toys have been added to the collection.



The preset browser is now separate from the interface and the snapshots George was missing in V1 have been implemented and these can include dynamically changing elements. On the environment front there are a bunch of new small rooms and exteriors, some of which are not yet available in Altiverb. The Mic module is new and, apart from enabling you to select one of the mic samples, this also has a control to add carbon mic granule degradation. The new Cover module enables a source to be enclosed in a car boot, a box, a saucepan etc. and a variety of objects can cover a sound source, such as blankets, suitcases, boxes, glass cups, car trunks, and

walls to name a few. The pitch adjustment can be used to enhance the effect.

In the Telecom Codec section a 'Liquid' option produces some really watery sounds. A Leslie simulator now appears on the right hand side of the interface. Saving the best for last there is an LFO Envelope module with four LFOs and two envelope followers for automated parameter control. You just click and drag a cable to a parameter that you wish to control with the LFO or envelope. The speed can be synced with the host DAW's tempo and there are loads of waveforms to play with.

With these additions S2 has become a very serious sound design tool for music and post. I would go so far as to say it is indispensable for anyone working in sound for picture. ■

**PROS** Modest CPU load and memory footprint; speed; the samples.

**CONS** Needs study to get the best out of them; not available as rack mounting units ;-); not much else.

## Contact

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