

Bias Peak Pro XT 5

Peak has long been a favourite stereo editing program on the Mac, and version 5 sees a steady progression of improvements and enhancements. **GEORGE SHILLING** dongles up and pedals his way through a very complete package.

PEAK IS A NICHE product that duplicates many DAW functions but puts the focus on processing a stereo signal, destructively or non-destructively, as opposed to multitrack. A Playlist window incorporates comprehensive CD mastering and comprehensive stereo editing is the priority



with useful tools and clear displays; multiple documents can be tiled or maximised. All common file formats are supported, along with the less common, including MP4, QuickTime and JAM Image. The maximum sample rate is an incredible 10MHz and Batch Processing makes converting different sample rates and formats less of a chore.



There are differently priced versions with feature sets to suit differing needs and pockets; the XT 5 version is the all-singing, all-dancing edition. This includes better DSP algorithms, and bundled packages with audio restoration and effects, although DDP file format support is still an additional paid-for option on top of the price of XT (UK£702 + VAT).



Authorisation is now achieved with a USB dongle, but even so be prepared to type in multiple serial numbers. Furthermore, Internet authorisation is required — this didn't work properly for some of the bundled components, and involved emailing files back and forth to Bias. Once the authorisations are on the dongle, that should be the end of the matter, but finding a free USB slot can also be a nuisance.



Audio recording and playback is easily configured for specific connections on any Core Audio device, or OSX Audio HAL or FireWire DV. The main display includes a Toolbar at the top of the screen with a customisable selection of buttons, by default including opening and saving files, Undo and Redo (which are unlimited with edit history available), import from and burn to CD, zoom, loop, basic transport, and a selection of DSP functions. Along the bottom of the screen this bar is mirrored by a dedicated transport bar with LCD-style counter, transport buttons, very clear horizontal LED-style meters, and a slider for output level.

This leaves the majority of the screen available for other windows — most importantly the graphic representation of the audio files being edited or mastered. This comprises a detailed and zoomable main display,

with an overview directly above for instantly clicking and jumping to different points. I found it a little disconcerting and distracting that there is no background as such; if a file display is not maximised or tiled with other windows, the desktop is visible behind. The display itself is customisable,

with different colours and shadings available to suit personal taste. Working with files for editing is intuitive, with a selection of familiar tools available at the top of the file display, or via shortcuts, and parts of files definable as Regions.

Scrubbing and Jogging is available with different time windows, plus an analogue tape mode, although using this, I came to expect my Mac to 'unexpectedly' quit Peak.

Now included is a redesigned Playlist window for compilation and mastering of CDs, with full Red Book support, including dedicated features such as ISRC codes and CD Text. Audio can be viewed on a single line or on an alternating dual display, and making crossfades and editing PQ codes is straightforward and comprehensive, although the program wouldn't seem to see my FireWire NEC burner.

Options for varying the quality of sample rate conversion and other DSP functions seem somewhat superfluous when using a modern, fast Mac, as only when processing really large files does the offline processing time become a factor — I generally set all such options to the best possible setting and rarely found myself drumming fingers. This is where the info display at the bottom can help, as any kind of processing function shows not only a wide progress bar, but also as a countdown timer — so you know whether to start engaging the client in conversation while waiting.

There are five dedicated plug-in slots available for real-time processing, these can subsequently be bounced. However, the integrated Vbox 2.0 routing matrix feature allows for complex routing of many more effects if required. Full support for VST and Audio Unit plug-ins enormously increases the range of processing available — Bias includes the excellent Master Perfection Suite that includes SuperFreq paragonic EQs with different numbers of bands, Repli-Q EQ-matching, Sqweez compressors with multiband options, and ImpulseVerb convolution reverb. Also bundled are the superb audio restoration tools SoundSoap and

SoundSoap Pro, these include processes for the removal of hum, rumble, clicks, crackles, and broadband noise.

Offline processing comes under the DSP menu where there is an enormous list of available functions including regulars such as Normalize (peak or RMS), Gain Envelope, Fades, Reverse and so on, along with more unusual and radical effects such as Phase Vocoder and Rappify (*I think Rappification is better. Ed*). Also here are utilities such as sample rate conversion, and means to change duration and/or pitch with new improved algorithms. However, just a 3% duration change made a very obvious degradation to sound quality.

Although hardware samplers are something of a dying breed, direct support is available for interfacing with E-Mu, Ensoniq, Kurzweil, Yamaha and SMDI compatible units, although oddly it seems there is no evidence of Akai or Roland sample formats. When editing files there are a number of functions for creating and tweaking loops. Loop Surfer and Loop Tuner functions are useful, although the whole process seems rather fiddly compared to using, say, Logic/Apple Loops or Ableton Live.

Peak continues to find friends in many areas from mastering engineers to editors and sound designers. Dedicated snap-to PS2 and Xbox loop boundaries makes this a useful choice for game work. Its editing and playlisting features are unbeatable for those working in stereo on the Mac. ■

PROS

Excellent stereo editing and mastering package; great restoration tools; AU and VST support; comprehensive CD mastering; Pow-R dithering.

CONS

Macintosh only; no surround or multichannel support; DDP costs extra; authorisation was particularly time-consuming!

EXTRAS

The Bias Master Perfection Suite is a collection of six plug-ins for mastering and sound design. Part of Peak Pro XT 5 it is being offered as a separate product with universal plug-in host compatibility on Mac OS X and Windows XP. The Suite includes Repli-Q (spectral/EQ matching), PitchCraft (pitch correction/manipulation), Reveal (seven-tool analysis suite), Sqweez-3 & -5 (linear phase multiband compressor/limiter/expander), SuperFreq (new edition of the 4, 6, 8 and 10-band parametric equaliser suite), and GateEx (gate/downward expander).



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